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Feminism, empowerment and popular education in Nicaragua.

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FEMINISM, EMPOWERMENT AND POPULAR EDUCATION IN NICARAGUA

A Dissertation Presented

by

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The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the development of educational alternatives for women's empowerment. My experience in the Sandinista Revolution and my Nicaraguan "compañeras" in the struggle are my inspiration for this work. My commitment for the historically oppressed and the dream of a world where justice, beauty and peace prevail induced me to search for such alternatives.

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ABSTRACT

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Although popular education efforts developed during the decade of Sandinista government in Nicaragua were singularly successful in promoting literacy and constructing popular power, they were limited by an exclusive focus on class analysis and a masculine epistemological framework. In the deployment of the practice-theory-practice methodology of popular education, the specificities of women's day-to-day experience -- centered in both private and public realms, and including subjective as well as "objective" dimensions -- were not considered as aspects of that practice or reality. Because reality was not understood dialectically, a) its transformation was limited to the public sphere, at the expense of challenging inequalities for women in the domestic realm; b) was concerned only with women's immediate needs, at the expense of the strategic gender needs which must be pursued if women are to overcome their marginalization; and c) neglected women's intimate, psychological aspects, at the expense of examining sources of rivalry and competition between women so that a new form

of "sisterhood" or "power-with" could be developed to replace the verticalism and "power-over" inherent in the male exercise of power.

Feminist pedagogy might contribute more to popular education than a modification of content -- adding gender consciousness to class analysis, and introducing themes such as the validation and reclaiming of women's bodies in order to deconstruct their subordinated identities. By recognizing the existence of multiple forms of oppression and the complexity of interconnected power relations, this pedagogy has opened pathways toward achieving a holistic approach to confronting oppression by means of educational practices. Using power relations as a point of departure for popular education, regardless of the specific context of any particular group, would allow the development of the critical consciousness, common visions, and collective will to strive for comprehensive equity in social relations.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Where I Am Coming From

The development of educational processes for women's empowerment is extremely important for me, as a woman, as a Sandinista, as an educator and as a feminist committed to political struggle and transformation. This commitment toward women's empowerment has emerged from my participation in the Sandinista Revolution and the contradictions I experienced in the revolutionary process.

I returned to live in my country, Nicaragua, when the triumphant Sandinista Revolution of July 19, 1979 overthrew Somoza's dictatorship which had been in power for forty-five years. This revolution was the culmination of a struggle begun half a century earlier by General Sandino, who defended the country against U.S. military intervention between 1927 and 1933. Prior to the triumph, the majority of the people of Nicaragua suffered brutal oppression. Poor women and men were denied the right to work, among other rights, and together with children, the right to have an education and a healthy life.

The Sandinista National Liberation Front -- composed mostly of young people inspired by a sense of justice that called for a profound redistribution of power and wealth -- led a broad alliance of economic, social, and political forces against the Somocistas and formed a coalition

government to carry out a revolutionary project. This project was announced and developed from a nationalist perspective, proposing a mixed economy, multi-party system, non-alignment, and the construction of popular power, seeking to benefit historically marginalized groups.

During the eleven years of Sandinista government, deep structural transformations occurred such as: agrarian reform in favor of the peasantry, the formation of a productive State sector for generating resources for social projects, the development of production cooperatives, the expansion of education and health services for the poor, and the coalition of people to build up popular power. Within that framework, popular education, committed to promoting the organization and consciousness of the oppressed, played an important role in the emergence and consolidation of grassroots movements like the women's movement in Nicaragua.

Our dreams in Nicaragua and initial successes in development and participation from a popular perspective inspired many around the world, but they also provoked fear, distrust and ultimately war. With the U.S. government at the enemy helm, we were bombed, blockaded, berated and finally lost the elections in 1990. I believe this loss occurred in large part because our visions of power clashed. We were proposing and carrying out an experiment that threatened U.S. supremacy, especially in the Third World. The white men that constitute the majority of the United

States government demanded subservience and slavish obedience to their orthodoxy, to their brand of power and development. They could not tolerate an alternative vision and went about trying to shatter it. Our struggle to achieve a more equitable kind of society took place in this larger battlefield that killed our people, destroyed our resources and limited our ability to respond to desperate human need. The lessons that our experience provides -- for popular power and women's empowerment, in this case -- must be placed in this context of war and deprivation.

My interest in the relationship between power and education arose through my direct participation in the struggle to organize the nation -- after Somoza and his cronies were overthrown -- and in the definition of strategies and policies for the transformation of Nicaraguan society in three sites of power: the government, the Party (FSLN), and the popular organizations.

To begin with, my understanding was fundamentally founded on a class analysis. Nevertheless, gender gradually infiltrated my perspective. A brief account of my work experiences in spaces of power will allow a more thorough understanding of the origins of my concern, and in particular, of my interest in contributing to the development of consciousness-raising processes that aim to deconstruct and reconstruct women's subordinated identities.

My first responsibility in the Revolutionary government was in the newly formed Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA,

later called MIDINRA), where I was Director of the Social Department. This position implied the task of looking for solutions to problems in rural areas related to housing, education, health and so on. The first six months after the Revolution, I coordinated the planning of an integrated rural development program, while simultaneously performing various kinds of political organization work -- like the rest of the Sandinistas -- which included organizing brigades of workers to harvest crops and distributing donations which came into the country immediately after the insurrection war.

When the Ministry of Planning was formed in January of 1980, I was named Director of the Department of Social Planning. At the macro level, this ministry was responsible for the preparation of national strategies and policies for economic and social change. In the Department of Social Planning, we were specifically in charge of defining general sectoral policy guidelines which included the areas of education, health, housing, transportation, and other social amenities. Furthermore, we were assigned the tasks of developing the necessary coordination among different institutions and popular organizations, and gathering information (censuses surveys, research, etc.) required for planning in a country in which that type of information was either entirely or at least practically obsolete.

With the objective of incorporating popular sectors into the national planning process, a methodology was

designed that would unite ministerial technocrats and leaders of popular organizations to make decisions. Communication was encouraged between planners and leaders -- most of whom were men -- during different stages of the planning process. Nevertheless, this attempt to institutionalize the leaders' participation did not continue after the first years of revolutionary government. Gradually, leaders stopped coming to meetings, claiming that these were a waste of time because they had trouble understanding the technocrats' language, their ideas and proposals. Also, they felt that urgent tasks had to be carried out for which they had to organize the people such as harvesting and drying crops, things that could not be postponed due to seasonal constraints.

In 1982 I went to work at the Ministry of Education, seeking to learn and understand the complexities of micro spaces. My responsibility there consisted of coordinating an educational program using participatory research methodology, which was developed in the rural community of El Regadío in Estelí. This program was similar to previous work in that it attempted to obtain information and coordinate different state institutions with grassroots organizations. However, it differed in that this program was conducted at the micro-level of the community. The objective was for community members to participate in the compilation of information regarding their political-socio-economic conditions, and in the definition

and collective implementation of specific projects striving to solve problems in the community.

One of the most relevant difficulties that arose in this experience was the tension generated in efforts to articulate overall proposals -- drawn up without much information about local realities -- and local proposals: between the top-down decisions coming from directive entities of the FLSN, popular organizations' national leaders and the government, and bottom-up proposals coming from members of the community. Another problem was the tension that arose in some of the women's workshops that I coordinated when I resisted presenting my ideas before theirs. I did this intentionally in order to break out of historical patterns of submission to and dependence on traditional educators and to instead assemble proposals and solutions on the basis of the participants' own opinions. My resistence to "lead" in a traditional style immediately provoked a series of symptoms in the participants -- headaches, backpains, domestic emergencies, etc. -- and they sought to withdraw from the workshops. This struck me as one way in which we women avoid confronting our subordination, our attitudes and identities, and this limits our exploration of new forms of dialogue. If we could learn to tackle that confrontation, we might allow the development of self-esteem based on all the creative abilities we possess.

After this experience in a specific community, I stopped working within the government and went to work with popular organizations. From 1983 to 1986 I worked at UNAG, the largest grassroots organization in the country which brings together 70 percent of all producers in the country who account for close to 50 percent of agricultural production. In this organization, I was considered a member of the technical staff and did not function as part of the organization's political structural leadership which was composed of peasants and producers only. As Director of the Project Department I was in charge of project design, fundraising and evaluation. Also, I worked on the design and coordination of educational programs for organization and training planification within the structures of UNAG, using participatory research and popular education methodology. These programs presented challenges not only to the interaction between different levels within the organization, but also to the coordination of various social sectors -- small, middle-sized and large producers -- and their specific areas of production (coffee, cotton, basic grains, etc.)

One of these programs consisted of training 3720 leaders from 76 Zonal Councils -- structures of UNAG at the zonal level. This program was implemented through workshops that brought together leaders from different zones who then recreated those workshops and study groups in zonal cooperatives at the grassroots level. A series of pamphlets

were prepared for these programs to assist the leaders in carrying them out.

My work experience at UNAG, the leadership structure of which was composed exclusively of men, had a strong impact on my future work and the development of my feminist consciousness. Whenever I presented proposals and opinions -- mainly related to specific problems of female producers or male producers' wives -- they were, more often than not, perceived negatively by the men, with suspicion and disdain, as proposals invading their "turf." There are many consequences to the fact that Nicaraguan producers and peasants have particularly machista practices -- through their attitudes, customs, norms, values and beliefs; in me these attitudes generated important reflections on my own struggle and internal resistence to change, broadening the vision of my subordinated condition and the need to make alliances with other women in order to advance my emancipation.

In 1986 I worked as a consultant to the Department of Organization of the FSLN. My work consisted of designing and coordinating research on the work methods and organization of the party at a time when, due to the intensification of the war, the decision was made to unify command of the government, the party, and popular

organizations.[1] During the period I also participated with other women in a group that we organized to share our specific gender concerns. The group prepared a document about Nicaraguan women's problems and needs, which was presented to the National Leadership of the FSLN in the hope of introducing a gender perspective to revolutionary analysis.

In 1987, I began to work for the Women's Association, AMNLAE (Asociación de Mujeres Luisa Amanda Espinoza). In this grassroots organization, I served as Director of the Educational Department and coordinated a participatory research program aimed toward women's empowerment which is thoroughly emphasized in this thesis. This experience within the organization that presumed to coordinate all women's organizations in the country allowed me to learn about the forms in which women reproduce and create patriarchal power. In addition, it made me reflect on the implications for seeking a new power from and for women inclusive of our diversity, and capable of resolving the enormous difficulties we have in identifying with each other -- a new power generating the energy needed to carry out profound changes to improve the world together with men.

All of these experiences "from within," beginning at the macro level (government), next in the micro level (rural

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[1] The unified leadership sought the articulation of government actions with plans of the mass organizations and military activities promoted by the army within internal leadership organisms of the FSLN.

communities), and finally in a dual capacity (within the structures of the Party and grassroots organizations) brought forth questions regarding the role of education for empowerment of the popular sectors and particularly of women. Synthesized, these questions were mainly related to the development of popular power that we sought to construct and which implied a new form of power relations differing from cultural and historical patterns of domination: between institutions such as the government, the FSLN, and the grassroots organizations; between the macro and micro levels; between leaders and the people, and educators and participants; between men and women and their visions of the world. How could a dialogue take place between participants in collective spaces when there were serious communication problems, different conceptual and linguistic definitions? How could a broader understanding of reality be attained in order to change that reality, one transcending the prevailing vision of economics, politics and social relations? How could a new culture capable of transforming the oppression experienced by women in Nicaragua be created? What different educational strategies with integrated perspectives on society's multi-faceted oppression could be developed that would empower historically oppressed groups?

After having worked for several years utilizing and teaching popular education methodology I often felt that my experiences as a woman had not been included: the tensions experienced in the hidden world of my home, the rearing of

my five children, the anxiety and guilt that resulted when I did not dedicate enough time to them and transgressed the "housewife" role into which I had been socialized, the established gendered division of labor which also kept my partner from participating equally in household tasks, and so on. Similarly, I also recognized that in the educational processes that I had coordinated, I was often blind to the needs of other women as well as to their ways of understanding and transforming the world. In addition, I intuitively believed that popular education over-emphasized the rational, and delegitimized other ways of learning about experience. I knew that my feelings, senses, body and relationship with nature had in some way been an integral part of my own transformation and commitment to political struggle. Failing to incorporate these elements into a liberating education not only seemed to ignore the way that women and others tend to react to and with the world, but also could lead only to a limited and fragmented social transformation. Based on these reflections, I sensed a need for a more thorough understanding of the situation of women in the country which would transform and enrich the conception of reality assumed by popular education until then.

Convinced that women's realities were the starting point for the definition of adequate educational strategies for women, I became interested in having a broader understanding of our historical and cultural situation and

the political organizational efforts which determine our levels of subordination. With these objectives in mind, I coordinated research in 1989 through Cenzontle which contributed important elements to the definition of alternative educational strategies for women's empowerment.[2] My commitment to and experiences with the Sandinista revolution, my militancy in the women's movement, the movement's problems and advances, the results obtained in my aforementioned research and my own personal struggle in which I strive to deconstruct my subordinated identity, have been the main sources of inspiration for this work.

B. The Content of this Thesis

This thesis centers around a critique of popular education developed under the Sandinista government in Nicaragua from a Nicaraguan feminist perspective -- that is, from the practice and reflection of Nicaraguan women to subvert the oppression of their gender.[3] My intention is

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[2] CENZONTLE, The Center for Democratic Participation and Development, is an independent grassroots support organization and mini-think tank that backs programs aimed at challenging and transforming inequitable structures of power. It provides education, technical assistance, credit, commercial links and research to peasants, farmers, women and other grassroots groups. It was founded in 1987 by a group of educators, sociologists, anthropologists, and economists, including myself.

[3] For the purposes of this work, empowerment is understood as the capacity of individuals and social groups to change from within, to engage in decision-making, and to build new forms of horizontal "power-with" instead of "power-over" through which individuals expropriate and dominate through controlling the wills of others. It refers

to contribute to the imagination and implementation of educational processes generating and maintaining the insurrection of consciousness; the rebellion and transformation of the ideologies, customs, values, beliefs and sentiments that comprise oppressive cultures and perpetuate economic deprivation for people of the Third World.[4]

The dissertation is composed of two parts with respective chapters, and a conclusion. In the first part, "Popular Education as a Means for Empowerment," which consists of two chapters, I analyze the popular education promoted in Nicaragua during the period in question, offering a contextualization of its Latin American origins. The first chapter in part one presents a brief review of the history of popular education in Latin America, mentioning some of the debates that have emerged and whose axes could be defined in relation to the challenge of promoting

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to consciousness-raising processes that allow individuals to acknowledge, through group identification, their individual and common problems of oppression. It implies a permanent struggle and rebellion against the various oppressive relations and historically constructed ideologies, myths, beliefs and psychological "mandates" to which individuals are constantly submitted. Popular education is understood as a process of production, dissemination and appropriation of knowledge geared toward social, economic and political transformation in favor of the oppressed. Feminism is understood as the response and protagonistic action of women, from their gender-defined condition, to subvert the power that reproduces their oppression. Feminism emerges and continues to define itself as it confronts power.

[4] The "insurrection of consciousness" is a term invented by Orlando Núñez; see La insurrección de la conciencia.

educational processes of a national character; the Marxist class alternatives; the influence of Paolo Freire's humanist thought; the new options arising from popular uprisings; and the clarification of the popular subject in which women figure prominently. It is not meant to constitute an exhaustive history of popular education or a comparative account of Latin American thought, which is inarguably rich and full of nuances and complexities. The objective of the chapter is to set a general frame of reference for the subsequent discussion on the experience of popular education in Nicaragua.

In the next chapter, we go to Nicaragua in order to describe and reflect on the popular education strategies that were developed there. The historical context of struggle is presented and analyzed, as are the specific popular education programs launched during the period of revolutionary government, particularly the National Literacy Campaign and Adult Education Program. I discuss the similarities, dilemmas and silences present in and between these processes and the lack of recognition, in most cases, of the specific reality in which women live.

In the second part, "Women in Nicaragua: A First Step Toward Creating A Feminist Approach to Popular Education," which consists of three chapters, the forms, avenues, spaces and contents of women's participation in society are analyzed from their gender condition. In the first chapter I present their life in the private world, which constitutes

the structural base of their subordination. Reference is made therein to women's historical legacy of surbordination which amounts to a form of domestic imprisonment that is not natural or chosen by women, but rather has been imposed on them. I analyze further women's current condition, which revolves around serving others, and the phenomenon of single motherhood which I suggest has been forced upon women rather than necessarily indicating progress in their liberation.

The second chapter presents women's participation in the public sphere: their integration into the labor force, and their participation in the revolution, in various mass organizations, and in the women's movement and important spaces of power -- as commanders, ministers, directors, and so on. Finally, in the third chapter, a specific educational experience with women is presented -- one promoted by women from a gender perspective. I examine the implications of that case study and isolate critical issues in an effort to resolve the contradiction between popular education and feminist education.

In the last part of this dissertation, I present general conclusions, as well as some ideas for advancing the definition of educational alternatives incorporating a holistic perspective of reality -- that is, alternatives fostering a comprehensive analysis of the different relations of oppression which, interlaced, exist in the various spaces where educational programs are developed.

C. Methodological Approach and Limitations

This thesis is based upon my own work experience as an educator and a feminist and upon the revision of documents and case studies. The study was undertaken through a social, philosophical, and historical approach within a multifaceted paradigm of social science.

Both quantitative and qualitative information was used but I concentrated on the latter. Although I used some quantitative data obtained through research and studies -- some of which I coordinated -- I disagree with quantitative research as traditionally conceived, based on the assumption that there is a single, objective reality and that the world is out there for us to observe, know and measure. I believe that there are multiple perspectives of truth and that reality is not given, but instead is socially constructed. Popular education processes and the situations of women are analyzed historically in this thesis to the extent that they are placed in the occurrences of concrete social formations and are analyzed in the framework of socioeconomic, cultural and political national circumstances.

Unlike other approaches in social sciences which demand "detachment" rather than "involvement" of the researcher and the individuals who are directly involved in the activities studied, I deal with reality as having subjective qualities which have to be incorporated into analysis (Maguire, 1987). This does not mean that reality is only subjective, since we are all affected by "objective" systems and institutions

external to ourselves. Nevertheless, I tried to understand the effects of educational processes and changes in human beings from the point of view of the individuals who are directly involved in the experiences I study. In that sense I agree with Merrian, who states that "research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education" (Merrian, 1988: 12). Within this perspective I attempted to understand the meaning of women's experiences, their multiple realities and popular education in Nicaragua by analyzing previous interviews with women leaders and my own experience as a woman, educator, and activist within the women's movement.

In accordance with Glaser and Strauss I used qualitative data freely in an attempt to derive theory rather than using data as a means of testing already formulated theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This work assumes that theories and concepts ought to be consistently questioned and reformulated. I have specifically reviewed some of the literature on popular education, feminist theory, feminist pedagogy and theories of power. Many other theories -- about social classes, production and reproduction, private and public, the state, sexuality, subjectivity, patriarchy, psychology, hegemony, post-structuralism, etc. -- also enrich this work.

There are many obvious limitations to this study. Based on the approach that I choose there are inevitably subjective interpretations of the data. There is no watertight mechanism for ensuring the validity and reliability of the data. The safeguard which I offer against this problem is an adequate degree of intellectual integrity and the exposure of all data to scrutiny; this study will be discussed with popular educators and female political activists in Nicaragua. This work constitutes an effort at theorization to be discussed and contrasted with the experiences of others involved in educational processes directed at the empowerment of historically oppressed people.

Because I reviewed phenomenological interviews, some variation occured in the depth and content of analysis. Although I attempted to guarantee a broad perspective, contrasting those interviews with my own experiences as a woman and with those of other women whom I have met through different educational processes and within the women's movement, I cannot claim that I know the opinion of every woman who has participated in popular education programs in Nicaragua.

It is evident from the topic that I have chosen for this thesis that I have certain biases regarding "male perspectives" on education. Although I am very sympathetic to the efforts that some men and women in Latin America have made in developing better liberatory popular education

processes from a class perspective, I firmly believe that unless those experiences are analyzed from the perspective of other forms of domination, liberation cannot be achieved.

Finally, this thesis is inevitably "limited" by who I am: female, white, 45 years of age, upper-middle class, Nicaraguan, heterosexual, intellectual, and a single mother of five children. I necessarily viewed this work through the lenses of these multiple identities. I believe that I find myself highly privileged as a member of several powerful social groups. Therefore, as a corresponding responsibility I am required to examine my own privileges of class and age, my role as an intellectual, my homophobia as a heterosexual and my racism as a white person. The trustworthiness of this study is based on my awareness of the aforementioned biases.

PART I

POPULAR EDUCATION AS A MEANS FOR EMPOWERMENT

CHAPTER II

POPULAR EDUCATION AS A STRATEGY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN LATIN AMERICA

In the history of Latin America popular education has been conceptualized and put into practice in a variety of ways. Referring to a group of ideas that have not been analyzed in much depth, "popular education" has comprised a series of general discourses -- directed toward the oppressed, liberating, participatory, creative, consciousness-raising, conducive to the organization of popular movements, within or outside of the formal education systems set up mainly by men -- most of which urge a political commitment toward social change.[1]

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[1] There is no consensus over the definition of "popular education" in Latin America despite various efforts made by several authors to conceptualize it (Oscar Jara, Marcos Arruda, Rosa María Torres, Carlos Núñez, Pancho Vio Grossi, etc.). According to Jorge Osorio, president of the Council of Adult Education in Latin America (CEAAL), "Popular education cannot be defined only by the modality it assumes as an educational process (out-of-school or not), nor by the didactic methods, techniques and procedures it employs, but rather by its class character" (Osorio, 1988: 14). With regard to this matter, and above all for North American readers, the distinction made by Marcy Fink as to popular education and nonformal education is interesting: "Although the terms 'nonformal education' and 'popular education' are at times used interchangeably in the United States, a distinction should be made because of the role popular education identifies for itself as an instrument for social and structural change. Differences are implicit in their nomenclature: 'Nonformal education' tends to focus on the individual and specific technical skills development; popular education looks at community and organization training needs, emphasizing the skills needed to bring about improvements in economic and social well-being as a whole... there is no commonly agreed-upon definition of popular

The most well-known experiences are those that unfolded in the sixties, strongly influenced by Paulo Freire's thought and pedagogical practice mainly with Christian grassroots groups in Brazil. Nevertheless, other Latin American pedagogues and thinkers engaged in politics and preceding Freire, such as Simón Rodriguez, Julio Antonio Mella, Farabundo Martí, José Carlos Mareátegui, among others, instigated processes and developed ideas that were just as valuable. Some were also similar to Freire's ideas, which constitute the roots of popular education theory in Latin America. In the attempt to learn about our history, these processes demonstrate important lessons and debates which must be seized and analyzed in order to define future strategies for popular education.

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education, but two components seem key: the pedagogic and the sociopolitical dimensions. In the pedagogic arena: Popular education proposes a methodology for learning that is participatory and egalitarian, designed to eliminate the power component of the educator's role... strives to develop among... social sectors a critical social awareness and understanding of how society functions... it is often combined with skills training in which two levels of knowledge are valued: 1) the traditions, knowledge, abilities, and experiences of the participants; and 2) the transmission of new technical skills and information. In the sociopolitical arena: Popular education programs work with those sectors of the population most marginalized by their socioeconomic status, targeting women, unemployed youth and adults, peasants, and indigenous groups. Proponents of popular education strive to facilitate the active involvement of participants in social change processes, as subjects in the historical process rather than passive bystanders... is part of a broader effort aimed at building social movements and transforming society through social and structural change. It is a vehicle for the development of skills necessary to forge this more just society" (Stromquist, ed., 1992: 174-175).

From the eighties and on -- within the context of the triumphant Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua and the emergence and consolidation of new social movements since the sixties, including the women's movement -- a cycle of important reflections developed in which new and enriching debates surfaced and historical themes regained pertinence.

In this chapter I will present a brief historical review of popular education in Latin America mentioning the debates that have arisen, the axes of which could be defined: in relation to the challenge of promoting educational processes with a national character; the Marxist class-based alternatives ; the influence of Freire's humanist and Christian thought; the new educational options emerging from popular uprisings; and clarifying the diversity of the popular subject in which women figure prominently.[2]

A. The First Struggles for a Nationalist Education

Educational processes are overdetermined by numerous interlaced economic, ideological and political contradictions that determine their specificity. These contradictions are present in the educational situation and

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[2] This is not meant to constitute an exhaustive historical account of Popular Education nor a comparative review of Latin American thought, which is inarguably rich and full of nuances and complexities. The purpose of this chapter is to set a general frame of reference for the subsequent discussion of the Popular Education experience in Nicaragua.

form the raw materials out of which its content and pedagogical practice are elaborated. Educational demands, programs and theory emerge from struggling classes, genders, races and other social groups whose existence is not merely economic but also political-ideological. Therefore, education constitutes "a battlefield which, extended throughout the entire social network, forms part of the groups of contradictions which characterize the social formation" (Puiggros, 1987: 3). In Latin America, such a social formation is intimately linked with and seriously dependent upon the imperialist countries of the North.

From the Jesuits of the colonial days to current community development programs, we encounter different concepts and practices of popular education directed toward certain oppressed groups but not always with liberating objectives. Often the processes have aimed at achieving consensus and guaranteeing social reproduction so that dependent and oppressive governments might maintain their hegemony, hampering authentic efforts toward national liberation.

During colonial times, for example, popular education was seen as in charge of appeasing the colonized people who had to carry out the tasks assigned by the Crown (Puiggros, 1987). Later on, around independence, hegemonic ideas of the Enlightenment in France and Spain colored Latin American pedagogical thought, which recognized Rousseau's relation

between pedagogy and politics.[3] At that point, the following alternatives were posed: Promoting an education that would question and transform the bourgeois pedagogical discourse of European intellectuals, opening alternative paths to an education whose subjects would be the Latin American people, or promoting an education directed by the oligarchic-liberal State and aiming to adapt popular groups to modernizing economic and social changes.

Simón Rodríguez -- famed thinker of the past century and teacher to Simon Bolivar -- has been considered by many as the first popular educator in Latin America. Rodríguez understood cultural differences, breaking ground for an understanding of the American identity. He tried to define a democratic pedagogy that would respond to the needs and demands of the Latin American popular sectors, departing from the dominant bourgeois pedagogical ideas and practices. In the newborn American Republics he proposed that education be original, subversive, and derived from indians, blacks and mestizos themselves rather than servilely emulating Europeans. It had to be linked to production and, above

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[3] Rousseau questions the supposedly eternal and universal quality of academic pedagogy, recognizing various dimensions of education: institutional education, "education of the world" and "domestic or natural education." For him, "pedagogy is only one science" which comprises all the ways of teaching... of man's obligations, but also his freedom" linked to politics inasmuch as it exposes the contradiction between freedom and social order" (Puiggros, 1987: 7).

all, had to guarantee that young people would be aware of their rights as well as their obligations (Mejía, 1990).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, the education system promoted by the oligarchic-liberal governments was the dominant one, permanently enhancing their access to oppressed groups. Public, lay, compulsory State instruction was considered synonymous to popular education and the enlightened groups trusted in its "civilizing" effect, linking educational programs with political ones aimed at consolidating the oligarchic-bourgeois hegemony. Educational processes with subversive and questioning criteria initiated by Rodríguez and other pedagogues outside of the formal school system were ignored and devalued (Mejía 1990; Puiggros, 1987).

Nevertheless, Latin American school systems have always coexisted with alternative popular education processes and questioning pedagogical proposals. Whether organically linked to political proposals (nationalist, progressive religious, anarchist, leftist, Marxist-Leninist, popular movements, etc.), or developed within the framework of general political processes, these discourses have always tended to place education in agreement with its necessary contribution to social change.[4]

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[4] Based on a study conducted by the National University of Mexico entitled "Alternativas pedagógicas y perspectivas educativas" in the Pedagogy school of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, Adriana Puiggros made the subsequent hypothesis as to the permanent accompaniment of questioning experiences to the educational system (Puiggros,

The impact of such educational processes has been felt despite efforts on behalf of the dominant groups to ignore them and interpret them as marginal. They have emerged in connection with Latin American popular struggles -- though they are not synonymous -- featuring male and female protagonists, and have therefore contributed effectively to the different efforts toward social change that have been undertaken in the Latin American countries. Developed mostly as microlocalized processes and in some cases as great unfinished experiences, they demonstrate some of the difficulties and lessons inherent in the oppressed groups' consistent struggles to bring about transformations within institutions and in the conglomeration of social processes in order to attain their liberating ideals (Puiggros, 1987).

B. Marxist Paradigms and the Class Alternative

In the nineteen-twenties accentuated debates over popular education in Latin America arose within the Left. The Mexican revolution in 1910, the bolshevik triumph, and the rise of popular universities -- attempting to join intellectuals with the masses in Peru, Chile, El Salvador, Cuba, etc. through the University Reform that set new pedagogical ideas against the prevailing ones -- among other important events, lent context to these debates. In turn, the patriarchal liberal states began to promote their

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1987).

bourgeois "democratization" models proposing popular education projects of an assistentialist nature, which have largely failed.[5] These projects require all individuals to attend school, thereby granting the poor access to schools in an effort to lower the illiteracy rates. Nevertheless, these rates still remain very high in most of our countries.

Various debates could be distinguished at the time among the pedagogues of the Left. They debated mainly over the problem of the vanguard, the relation between leaders and intellectuals and the masses, populism, the indigenous problem, the role that Marxism and the Soviet experience should play, the Third International, and the national question (Puiggros, 1971; Gonzalez, 1981).[6] In these disputes the following viewpoints of Aníbal Ponce, Farabundo Martí and José Carlos Mareátegui could be distinguished.

Aníbal Ponce, an educator close to the Communist Party in Argentina, wrote the famed Education and Class Struggle, one of the books most widely read by the Left in Latin

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[5] "Assistentialism" refers to emergency relief aid that does not promote self-reliance and in fact promotes dependency.

[6] "The Third International... its initial policies governed by the imperative need to start armed uprisings everywhere in order to relieve pressure of bourgeois governments upon Russia and thus to safeguard the revolution, and possibly prompted also by the mistaken belief held at one time that revolution everywhere was imminent, developed lines of action that aimed at the creation of an international organization so centralized as utterly to ignore the conditions, social, political and industrial, that prevailed in other countries." (Socialist Labor Party, 1943)

America. In looking for answers to his social concerns, he was profoundly influenced by Durkheimian positivism and by a doctrinary and economist reading of Marxism.[7] Although he questioned the dominant educational content, he conceived popular education in terms of the diffusion of doctrine. He sought to replace bourgeois pedagogy with a "proletarian scientific" pedagogy, thereby legitimating a substitution of doctrines in the educational processes. From this point of view, similar to that of the liberals, it is assumed that people, among whom the proletariat is the revolutionary subject, need to be "injected" with the "true" reasoning of the "enlightened ones," the vanguards, negating the nuclei of common sense -- as Gramsci would call them -- presented by the oppressed sectors themselves.

For their part, Martí in El Salvador and Mella in Cuba, both associated with the Third International, tried to understand the particularities of the realities in their respective countries by employing the theoretical instruments of Marxism while stimulating a classic Socialist education. They sought to connect with their people,

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[7] Positivism lends science priority as an explanation to social phenomena. It argues for the predominance of reason, social questioning and scientific explanations that can be proved easily. Durkheim is considered to be one of the fathers of this strain of philosophical thought: "An unabashed positivist, he [Durkheim] was convinced that objective explanation would produce correct judgements about political values... What Durkheim's science 'discovered,' of course, was the importance of the very social facts his theory presupposed, namely, the importance of morality" (Alexander, 1982: 302-303).

attempting to safeguard particular cultural values, thus conducting an incredibly important political-ideological task within social movements which in the case of El Salvador culminated in the 1932 massacre. In the workers' cultural centers and the popular universities which they promoted, workers and intellectuals together tried to understand the oppressed situation that was experienced on a national level.[8]

In Nicaragua, also during that decade, Augusto César Sandino launched campaigns for literacy, primary and adult education, and technical training from an anti-imperialist, democratic, and nationalist position. These constituted an authentic counterhegemonic education system, the first students of which were mainly members of his "little crazy army" with whom he managed to expel the gringos who had invaded the country, and later on included peasants from the agricultural production cooperatives in Wiwilí.[9] The

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[8] Together with the worker and Communist leader Miguelito Marmol, Martí promoted politico-pedagogical acts of great relevance in the Popular University of San Salvador and the Popular University of Ilopango. Mella worked intensely on similar efforts to connect intellectuals to the masses in the José Martí Popular University in Cuba. By means of democratic organizational forms some of these experiences came to establish an education for self-reliance (Puiggros, 1987). Mella once stated that "...reactionary governments like the ones we have been subjected to, and are subjected to, foster illiteracy and stimulate it at their convenience, such that the people can not assimilate currents of modern thought and emancipating ideas of liberty" (Cabrera, 1977: 25-26).

[9] Argentine journalist and writer Gregorio Selser attributed the name "little crazy army" to the Army for the Defense of National Sovereignty organized by Sandino.

cooperative continued to exist until dictator Somoza García, pressured by the United States government, ordered Sandino's assassination in 1934 (Torres, 1985; Barndt, 1991).

José Carlos Mariátegui, a Peruvian politician and pedagogue, was the most successful in elaborating a popular, national and latinamericanist pedagogy from a Marxist theoretical perspective.[10] His liberatory pedagogy proposed to articulate the national popular will with class struggle. He proposed a union between the voices and struggles of the wide variety of individuals from distinct economic and social conditions. The particular cultural and ideological characteristics of indigenous peoples, peasants, workers, students and teachers, among others, were for Mariátegui a point of departure for national struggles with class struggle as an analytical axis. He opposed the conception that people should be "recipients" of knowledge, even if that knowledge had been emitted by the parties of the Left. He conceived as a fundamental task of the intellectual-teacher the articulation of people's common sense with Socialist ideas at a time in history during which

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[10] Mariátegui's Socialist position is thoroughly analyzed in Ofelia Schutte's book Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought. In it, the existential, ethical and sociopolitical dimensions of Mariátegui's Socialism are analyzed and constitute a "Socialist anthropology" for the author. Other important sources of inspiration for this thinker were the Peruvian teachers' movement, influenced by widely international schools of thought (Lunacharsky, Dewey, Unamuno, Ingenieros, etc.), and Gramsci.

most accepted without question the party-vanguard's role as depositors of knowledge.

Among the important events in popular education during the nineteen thirties which should be remembered are the debates around and attempts toward a national Socialist education in Mexico during the Cardenas period -- seeking to synthesize, similarly to Mariátegui in the case of Peru, Mexican particularities and needs with Marxist pedagogical statements -- and the experience of Warisata in Bolivia. The latter consisted, during a span of ten years, of developing a type of democratic form of organization that would rescue the indigenous culture and traditions.[11]

During the forties and fifties, around the Second World War, various educational reforms opposed to the oligarchic liberal model similarly came into effect. These responded to the demands of large nationalist majorities in countries where anti-imperialist, nationalist governments had been installed, provoked by great mass movements -- Peronism in Argentina, Arbenz in Guatemala, the Popular Front in Chile, the Bolivian MNR, and Brazilian trabalhismo.[12]

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[11] This model attempted to combine Socialist pedagogical principles -- school-workshop, comprehensive and polytechnic education, political education -- with Ayllú Inca principles. The pedagogical effort allowed deeply democratic organizational forms preserving the indigenous cultural traditions to be promoted. In order for Warisata to continue, it was believed that a social revolution needed to occur (Mostajo, 1983).

[12] These governments produced broad pedagogical discourses aiming for a transformation of the educational system by seeking to integrate the appeals and demands of

C. "Liberatory Pedagogy" and the Thought of Freire

The political history of Latin America has been characterized by cycles of civilian and military regimes. During the sixties and seventies military regimes continued or reappeared in the political scenarios of Nicaragua, Chile, Guatemala, Brazil Peru, Argentina, among other countries, closing certain democratic openings that had been made during the previous years. These openings led to the development of the Alliance for Progress backed by Kennedy, who took advantage of opportunities for collaboration since he feared the possibility that the successful Cuban Revolution of 1959 might be imitated.

The sixties were characterized by the emergence of popular and guerrilla movements seeking responses to various social groups' problems at a time in which crises in the hegemonic Latin American systems were becoming more acute (Jaquette, ed., 1989). At the beginning of that decade, during the popular nationalist government of Joao Goulart in Brazil, who was overturned by a military coup in 1964, Paulo Freire introduced important contributions to popular education at a moment when education "as a way of overcoming

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various oppressed social groups such as indigenous people, peasants, workers, teachers, petit bourgeois, and women to the pedagogical discourse of the State. It is relevant to point out the discourse of Eva Perón, which had a great pedagogical impact on the thousands of Argentine women who managed to understand their parallel condition as workers and as oppressed women.

marginalization" was the predominant line of thought within most of the governments.

In the light of the influence of Christian democrats, fundamentally Chilean, this strain of theory around overcoming marginalization suggested the existence of people who are integrated in society and others who are marginalized and who need to be included in development in order to end their alienation. In its application to popular education, it was proposed that in order to exit from a marginalized position it would be necessary to develop different communal actions, originating their "community education" project which was promoted widely by the Alliance for Progress and the "peace corps" with counterinsurgency intentions (Mejía, 1990).

Figuring prominently among Freire's most important propositions, which differ from positions mentioned previously and are similar to those developed by other thinkers in previous decades are: that the relationship between liberatory and questioning ideas of education and the need for struggle and radical commitment had not been seriously considered; his notion of an education transcending academic limits and representing a permanent struggle against dominant pedagogical models; the recovery and safeguarding of the culture, values and particular knowledge of the people, advocating the power of the oppressed to struggle for their emancipation; the unity between theory and practice through which both are

constructed and reconstructed from practice to theory and back to practice; and the dialogical relationship between student and teacher.[13]

Up until then, the various popular nationalist educational processes had lacked a serious systematization and analysis which would have facilitated criticism and theorization around them. But above all, they had lacked alternative proposals in the academic and didactic dimension of the educational process. The traditional relationship between teacher and student within pedagogical action had remained the same

> setting up the enormous paradox of the existence of a democratization process (impelled by the governments) allowing access for the oppressed sectors to the education system, but without great changes in the nature of participation within the system. (Puiggros, 1987: 47)

In this sense Freire stood for a transcendental advance.

From a humanist position strongly influenced by different strands of thought, among others the ideas of Mao, Ché Guevara, and Fromm, liberation theology, and the new "sociology of education,"[14] his methodological proposal for

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[13] See Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, La educación como práctica de la libertad, Conscientization as a Way of Liberating, Education for Critical Consciousness, and Pedagogy in Process: Letters to Guinea-Bissau.

[14] This school of thought emerged with force in England and the United States at the beginning of the seventies as a critical response to what could be called the discourse of traditional educational theory and practice. Its central question by means of which it develops its critique of the traditional education system and its own theoretical discourse, similar to that of Freire, was: How to attain a significant education in such a way that it will

"conscientization" in which the teacher-student dialogue became fundamental was developed and enriched.[15] Toward the beginning of the seventies, his work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, was published and distributed widely throughout Latin America, making an important pedagogical impact.

Freire's initial conception of "conscientization" failed to address the problem of class struggle, the diversity of the subject, the political nature of education, and the ideological background conditioning methods of educational action.[16] This failure led to the proliferation

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be critical and emancipating (Giroux, 1985).

[15] "Conscientization" as a conceptualization of the process of the psycho-social method allows for the transcendence of the traditional, school-based and "banking" (knowledge-depositing) conception of adult education. In its original form it maintains that it is necessary to impel a problematizing educational process to transform the "ingenuous" or "magical" consciousness of a people into a "critical consciousness." Ingenuous or magical consciousness expresses an oppressed and alienated situation. Therefore, the opressed masses ought to become aware of their situation, in order to then motivate itself toward a transforming action. In brief, first a critical consciousness must be developed (by conscientization) in order to subsequently implement a conscious action (Jara, 1981). In this process the educator plays a fundamental role. With regard to that matter, Freire developed his conception of dialogue, noting that "founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers (teacher-student) is the logical consequence... [O]nly dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education" (Freire, 1970: 79-80,81).

[16] Freire recognized this initial limitation of his conceptions in an interview conducted in Chile in 1973 and published in Themes of Education and Politics. In it he notes: "In my first works I hardly made any reference to the social class problem or their struggle [...] I was not

of numerous interpretations of the term, generating dissimilar and contradictory experiences and allowing for the vulgarization of the concept, its "popularization" and its reactionary deployment. Nevertheless, the close connection between educational work and political action that progressively solidified in Latin American popular movements confirmed that the classist political option was inextricable from any practice of popular education -- though alone insufficient, as we shall see later on. The "political dimension" of popular education -- as Oscar Jara, inspired by the triumph of the Sandinista popular revolution at the beginning of the eighties, would call it -- a dimension clearly assumed by certain thinkers of previous decades, came to be emphasized (Jara, 1981). In this manner, there were chances to overcome reformist conceptions in education, as well as the conceptions regarding development with which the great majority of experts and advisors work, especially those from countries of the North,

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capable of clarifying the process of conscientization such as I did in practice, thereby creating a distance between theorization and my practice [... I] did not do so because I was ideologized, a naive petit bourgeois intellectual. And in not doing so, I opened doors for naive people or experts to appropriate the concept of conscientization in order to use it and define it in reactionary terms without question, above all in Latin America" (qtd. in Jara, 1981: 52). Other forms of oppression, apart from those between rich and poor, are not made explicit by Freire. Regarding gender inequity it might suffice to mention that his discourse refers to "man" as a universal category, clearly reflecting a sexist ideological background. Nor does he question the power relations within religious institutions, between the parishioners and the priests, who is believed to obtain unquestionable "divine knowledge" conforming to the dogma.

with their proposals for "community development," "integral development," and "sustainable development," etc. (de Montis, 1992).

Finally, regarding Freire it is important to note that although he has been termed a populist to the extent that he glorifies popular elements; rejects the importation, manipulation and mechanical transmission of knowledge by intellectuals; and, above all, questions the vanguard parties' theory limiting possibilities for global organizational alternatives, one cannot deny the lessons that have been learned so far from different liberatory pedagogical experiences inspired by Freire (Puiggros, 1987). Likewise, one cannot belittle the importance that these lessons could have for the articulation of broad, diverse political processes arising from civil society with potential alternatives to the classic vanguard attitude predominant in the political leadership. As we shall see further on, such lessons are abundant in the popular education experiences in Nicaragua during the Sandinista period.

D. New Educational Options Emerging from Popular Uprisings

Without a doubt, toward the end of the seventies and during the eighties -- with the triumph of the Sandinista popular revolution, the impulse of guerrilla struggles in Central America, the problems and challenges confronting education reform in Cuba, in addition to the expansion and

strengthening of certain new movements such as the women's movement -- an important phase in debates over popular education in Latin America came to an end. Conferences ("encuentros"), networks, publications, regional coordination efforts, NGOs promoting popular education projects, etc. proliferated, seeking a greater understanding of the struggle developing within educational processes and to discover their logic and articulation with social struggles in their efforts toward global change.

The works of Oscar Jara, Carlos Núñez, Raúl Leis, Marcos Arruda, Orlando Fals Borda, Joao de Souza, Carlos Brandao, Rosa María Torres, among others were published, generating interesting disputes over how popular education is understood and implemented, between "scientific knowledge" vs. "popular knowledge;" what the "practice" or "reality" is from where the educational process should originate; the lack of systematization and research; academic research vs. participatory research; the predominance of "technicism" vs. theorization in popular education; the need to safeguard popular culture; the challenge to ensure that communication, popular theatre and the formulation of popular pamphlets really emerge from their social context and the new situation experienced by social movements. However, within these debates, other

forms of subordination in society other than class oppression were not highlighted.[17]

The popular education processes that were initiated clearly revealed the diversity of the subjects that participated and the consequent complexity presented to pedagogical practice. For instance, discussions seeking to deepen and clarify the specificities of those involved in the broad range of educational experiences emerged in the conferences of CEAAL through sectoral workshops (urban, union, rural, etc.) and program workshops (literacy, popular educator training, indigenous communities, Peace and Human Rights, Local Development, Participatory Research, Health, Theater, Systematization, Communication, Feminism and Popular Organization, etc.) (CEAAL, 1987).[18]

Beyond clarifying the pedagogical logic within educational processes themselves, what was aimed at was a greater understanding of the link between "macro" and "micro," between political leaders and the grassroots, between popular education and more comprehensive problems.

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[17] Later on, works began to be published by Latin American feminist intellectuals and popular educators, among others, Magaly Pineda, Rocío Rocero, Moema Viezzer, Rosa María Alfaro, Marcela Lagarde, Maruja Barrig, María del Carmen Feijoó, Julieta Kirkwood, and Virgina Vargas.

[18] CEAAL is the acronym for the Latin American Council for Adult Education (Consejo de Educación de Adultos Para América Latina) which is part of the ICAE, the International Center of Adult Education based in Canada. ICAE sponsors a program for women and CEAAL a Network for Women and Popular Education, opening important spaces for women's discussions and publications.

In addition, the subject of popular education could no longer be considered to be existing outside of the State after revolutionary governments appeared in Cuba and Nicaragua aiming for structural transformations, while at the same time strong struggles developed in other countries -- mainly El Salvador and Guatemala -- to overthrow the military governments. Then, a better understanding was sought of the subjects' relation to the revolutionary State, and to the revolutionary organizations aiming for a takeover of power.

In this new context of discussion -- as of 1975, when a significant rise in political mobilization in all the sectors of Latin American societies occurred -- a new era of women's mobilization began; an era comparable, in many ways, to the liberation movements at the beginning of the twentieth century but of a greater scope. Within these mobilizations, whose main impact has been felt in urban areas although there have also been mobilizations of rural women mainly in Peru, Cuba and Nicaragua where deeper agricultural reform has been implemented, women posed new questions to popular education, going beyond the class perspective that had prevailed until then.

E. The Diversities and Women

Since the wars of independence until today's guerrilla confrontations, Latin American women have participated actively in broad political movements. Their mobilization

has been linked, to a great extent, to the popular movements of the region, thereby existing in an unusual, close connection with the global popular sector problematic. Women have organized to protest, even before achieving the right to vote in some countries. They have participated in clubs, parties, neighborhood groups or other organizational structures to demand justice in the face of the lamentable life conditions experienced by most people, the need for services, favorable prices, cleaning brigades, etc., and above all, in the face of the disappearances of their children and relatives during the horrible repression of military governments. The efforts of women's movements, among which the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina figure prominently, have been widely recognized.[19] Their members have managed to have their voices heard from traditional positions, yet opening possibilities for greater changes in existing gender relations.

Three types of Latin American women's movements can be distinguished and overlap: human rights groups, mobilizations of urban poor women, and feminist groups (Jaquette, 1989). The emergence of feminist groups -- in Chile, Peru, Brazil, Mexico, etc.-- toward the middle and end of the seventies provided an important current of growth and self-definition within the broad women's movement. These groups were formed by women belonging to leftist

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[19] For a further account of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, see: Feijoó, 1989; Fisher, 1989; Navarro, 1989.

political parties who became frustrated because their demands as women were not taken seriously. Usually middle class professionals with a university education and extensive political experience, these women began to form groups for reflection which in turn transformed into study and political action groups. By their origins as activists, many of these feminist groups assumed the task of linking a feminist analysis to broader social changes.

In many places, women's groups -- by offering programs and projects which explore the hidden realities of women -- are promoting educational alternatives that develop new organizational visions which better express their needs. Through these various practices women are contributing to the democratization of politics, overcoming the alienation to which they have been subjected by seeking to develop in themselves a consciousness as autonomous subjects rather than as victimized objects of their destiny.

The broad mobilization of women that has taken place has gradually come to signify a type of meeting point -- though not too easily since either one has its own particular emphasis -- between the feminist movement and popular education processes. In the latter, women have begun to struggle for a consideration of their own gender specificities, seeking to develop a vision and practice of popular education that is of and for women (ISIS, 1988). They find themselves struggling for their empowerment by arguing theoretically that popular education has focused on

the exploitation of the poor while neglecting or even concealing the contradictions of gender that determine their subordinated identities and which, interwoven with other forms of domination (social, economic, educational, cultural, ethnic, etc.) shape their lives.

The following chapters will present an analysis of the popular education efforts in Nicaragua from their particular understanding of economic, political, ideological and social contradictions during the period of Sandinista government, and the limitations that existed from a feminist perspective.

CHAPTER III

POPULAR EDUCATION IN NICARAGUA

A. The Historical Context: A Long Struggle Against Interventions

Given the low population density in Nicaragua, its abundant natural resources -- fertile land, gold, wood, fishing, petroleum -- its access to two oceans, and the potential for a waterway between them, one would expect to find a prosperous nation. However, the history of Nicaragua, similar to that of a majority of the so-called "Third World" or underdeveloped countries, is a history full of interventions, plunderings and deaths that taint the efforts toward building up the nation and dreams of democracy and social justice.

Though it was the Spanish who came first -- interested in land and other natural resources, and practically annihilating the indigenous population in the Pacific region -- followed by the English on the Atlantic Coast, the white men from North America would be the ones to stand out in their imperialist efforts in this small republic of 148,000 square kilometers and a population of no more than 4 million people. In 1885 William Walker led the first North American intervention, having the nerve to declare himself president, proclaim English to be the offical language of the country, and legalize slavery. Although his presidential term did not last very long, United States interests, upon the

construction of an interoceanic canal, led to a second intervention in 1912 that culminated in the withdrawal of U.S. Marines from the country, the U.S. appointment of and support for Anastasio Somoza García as director of the National Guard in 1933 -- the members of which were trained in the United States and Panama -- and the assassination of Augusto César Sandino in 1934.

Somoza had studied in the United States, worked as a translator for presidents, had a good command of English and was rumored to have had an affair with the wife of the U.S. Ambassador in Nicaragua. Therefore, he constituted the best option for representing and safeguarding the geopolitical, patriarchal, racist and commercial interests of the United States in this dependent agro-exporting country recently inserted into the worldwide capitalist system. As President F.D. Roosevelt himself accurately commented regarding Somoza, who turned out to be one of the most fatal dictators in the history of Latin America, "he may be a son-of-a-bitch, but he's our son-of-a-bitch" (Barndt, 1991: 30).[1]

Augusto César Sandino, a Nicaraguan mestizo rooted in the peasantry, had been a worker in Mexico and therefore had suffered firsthand the U.S. oil companies' class exploitation. He played a fundamental role in the

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[1] Not coincidentally, the first technical school in Nicaragua, founded in 1938, bore the name of this North American president.

withdrawal of the Marines in 1933, even though the interventionist war, little by little, began to be rejected also by the people of the United States themselves. Inspired by liberating ideas of sovereignty, Sandino's dream was to construct a more egalitarian, socialist, anti-imperialist and internationalist society. During the course of seven years, Sandino trained and led his tiny "Army for the Defense of National Sovereignty," engaging in guerrilla tactics in the mountains to resist the gringos' aerial bombardment. In addition, in those mountains he began to organize the peasants into agricultural cooperatives in which literacy and adult education campaigns were undertaken.

Sandino was inspired by and vested trust in oppressed peoples' capacity to change society and therefore laid the bases for a historical education and resistance by and for the Nicaraguan popular sectors, posing a serious threat to the puppet government allied with the United States administration. In 1934 Somoza ordered the execution of Sandino and the destruction of the agricultural cooperatives that he had established, setting off a long history of poverty, terror and massacres in the country. Nevertheless, as the poet Ernesto Cardenal would express in one of his poems, Sandino's ideas and blood -- along with those of many others who participated in the struggle and were tortured and executed by Somoza -- "would only fertilize the ground for future opposition movements" (Barndt, 1991: 32).

Under Somoza's rule, various armed efforts were made to depose the dictator. However, the more opposition grew, the more repression, torture and killings increased. In the beginning of 1960, drawing on the thoughts of Sandino, the Sandinista National Liberation Front was founded, promoting a new and long period of organization, consciousness-raising and struggle against the Somoza dictatorship -- which defended the specific interests of the Somoza family, certain oligarchic groups and national capitalists, and U.S. imperialist interests. That struggle culminated in the final popular uprising and triumph of the Sandinista Popular Revolution on July 19, 1979. The Somoza dynasty, which had lasted for more than forty years, and the dictator's cronies were defeated and expelled from the country by Nicaragua's men and women and the Sandinista Front. The latter managed with great ability and flexibility to articulate micro-localized popular initiatives and creativity with overall visions for social change, despite the politico-military organization and functioning required in the warlike situations characteristic of national liberation processes.

Nicaragua inherited from Somoza 50,000 dead, a foreign debt of 1500 million dollars, the intensified plundering of its riches, more than 100,00 wounded, 40,000 orphaned children, 150,000 people displaced from their homes, a machista family pattern, a high rate of prostitution, domestic violence and child abuse, economic losses

calculated to amount to 480,000 million dollars on account of the war, acute child malnourishment, illiteracy among half the population, and a critical economic and social situation for the wide majority of the population.[2] During the course of eleven years, until they lost the elections in February of 1990, the Sandinista Front -- which was unique in having a collective, although entirely male, national leadership -- tried to launch an anti-imperialist, non-aligned national project postulating a mixed economy and popular power in Nicaragua on the basis of that legacy at the same time as it sought to transform itself from a politico-military organization into a political party organization. However, in 1983 the North American intervention entered a new phase involving "low intensity" warfare, which hampered the Nicaraguan popular majority's dreams of freedom. This time, intervention took many guises: as a boycott on the weak Nicaraguan economy; as a worldwide campaign of systematic propaganda condemning the efforts of the Sandinista Revolution; and, above all, as financial and technical support for the counterrevolutionary forces led by Somoza followers "in exile" in Miami. These exiles were attempting to regain governmental power in order to promote the model of development required by their own class and gender needs and those of the U.S. government.

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[2] CEPAL, "Nicaragua: Economic Repercussions of the Recent Political Events." E/CEPAL/G. 1091/Rev.1: December, 1979. Cited in Torres, 1985.

Beyond the FSLN's internal problems and errors in its effort to promote profound social changes in Nicaragua, what undoubtedly influenced the election loss and change of government in 1990 were the deaths experienced by the majority of Nicaraguan families in the war, and the economic crisis. That crisis was provoked mainly by the external debt inherited from Somoza, the closure of export markets, and the paralysis of national industries dependent upon North American supplies which could not be obtained due to the boycott.

It is this context of struggles and limitations which should be taken into account in order to understand the attempts at extensive educational transformations that were made during the period of Sandinista government. As Fernando Cardenal, the Minister of Education from 1984 to 1990 would say, the educational changes in Nicaragua were framed by the serious contradiction of trying to "develop popular participation and the goal of winning the war, which inevitably became the primary objective" (Barndt, 1991: 20).[3]

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[3] Based on an interview with Fernando Cardenal in Quebec in May, 1990.

B. Popular Education is Part of the Revolutionary History in Nicaragua

Under Somoza, "popular education" programs aimed at "the poor" had been spoken of and implemented, but these had sought the consolidation of the hegemonic dictatorial system and the maximization of profits for the dominant sectors. More than fifty percent of all Nicaraguans were illiterate, two thirds of the students in the formal education system lived in urban areas mostly in the Pacific region of the country, only 68 percent of the school-age population -- mainly boys -- were enrolled in school, and more than half dropped out during the first year. Only five percent of all children in rural zones completed their primary education, and secondary education was accessible only to 18 percent of the potential population. More than half of all secondary school students studied subjects related to "Business" while less than 10 percent were preparing for work in the agricultural sector -- in a fundamentally rural country relying on agrarian production. Only 0.3 percent of the population completed higher education (Barndt, 1991). The dominant educational system effectively provided teaching for the development of underdevelopment, reproducing the relations of dependent capitalism, racism between the Pacific and Atlantic regions, and patriarchy.

In 1960, the government introduced the Interamerican Cooperative Service of Public Education, the first mass-based education program for teachers, by means of which

more than two thousand teachers, mostly women, were trained -- from the masculine logic of power. In 1972 the first national plan for educational development was implemented with technical assistance from the Southwest Alliance for Latin America, an institution backed by the AID (American International Development agency). Similar to other official programs executed during Somoza's regime, these sought to benefit the oppressive system -- from a liberal perspective and egalitarian discourse -- and, at most, offered crumbs to certain isolated groups without of course contemplating the roots of poverty and injustices.

The traditional education that was promoted from a conservative ideology reproduced relations between classes and nations based on the exploitation of the majority by a rich minority, interconnected with men's "power-over" relations. Its methods and contents were used to teach and reproduce the values of the powerful -- values like machismo, private consumption, and authoritarian and vertical relations between teachers and students preventing the latter from participating in the definition of educational strategies. On the basis of what was necessary to sustain the system, workers were trained by means of separating intellectual work from manual work and from the ideas and thoughts of productive, concrete activities. Peace Corps volunteers -- many of them young, idealistic, well-intentioned, naive North Americans -- joined the game as "popular educators," even employing some of the

pedagogical ideas of Freire within the Alliance of Progress programs promoted by President Kennedy. Without realizing it - focusing mainly on methodological and "technical" aspects of education and on the immediate survival needs of their students -- they helped to strengthen the model of development and modernization undertaken by Somoza in alliance with the United States government and in accordance with the needs of industrial capitalism undergoing expansion.

Consciousness cannot be developed and strengthened in the absence of political organization. While under Somoza, dependent and submissive attitudes were fostered among Nicaraguans, micro-localized initiatives of organization and popular consciousness-raising with liberatory objectives started to emerge in response. Certain civil associations, mainly religious ones, the progressive Church with its "delegates of the word" -- influenced by the discourse of the theology of liberation and partially by Freire's ideas -- some leftist political organizations, and the Sandinista Front began to claim that the subject of popular education could not be considered isolated and external to the State. Little by little the FSLN united these initiatives -- weaving together the work carried out by "little ants" and managing to unify an entire people into a type of cultural synthesis -- for the takeover of governmental power, from which would be launched a great number of educational efforts aiming for profound social changes favoring the

popular sectors.[4] Insofar as popular organization, the popular sectors' questioning of reality -- poverty, exploitation, oppression and the history of intervention -- and actions responding to that reality started to increase, the Somoza regime began to promote literacy programs among the peasantry. One of these was the Waslala plan in the northern region of the country from 1977 to 1979 which formed part of a government counterinsurgency strategy and by means of which 108 "literacy teachers" were mobilized, many of these serving as "ears" of the Somoza regime.

For the great majority of Nicaraguan and many Latin American popular educators, the aforementioned liberating experiences of organizing and consciousness-raising, similar to those that had been promoted by Sandino during his time, constituted efforts of revolutionary popular education. Moreover, the insurrection and its triumph constituted the first massive popular education experience, whose participatory and popular character determined the nature of the revolution, serving as the basis for the definition of the Sandinista project (Arruda, 1986).

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[4] Once in power, the FSLN launched the National Literacy Campaign, the Adult Education Program, Massive Consultations (in which all the members of the Cabinet would "face the people" of a community on a weekly basis), different mass organizations' educational programs, and others that have been mentioned throughout this work.

C. Popular Education Programs During the Sandinista Government

With the July 19 triumph, Somoza's state apparatus was destroyed -- the National Guard, the Liberal Nationalist party, Congress, the judicial system, the eleven existing Ministries, etc. -- so the Sandinista Front faced the challenge of initiating the organization of the Sandinista government. This task required a broader understanding of the different economic, social and cultural aspects comprising Nicaraguan reality which would allow the organization of government institutions and the implementation of specific policies in favor of the popular sectors. It would also require the selection and training of skilled and politically committed technicians and professionals capable of holding positions at high levels of responsibility from a revolutionary perspective -- people disposed to promote the Sandinista project of social transformation in the face of the withdrawal of all ministers, vice-ministers and most of the remaining governmental staff that had supported Somoza. At the same time, there was the challenge of involving the popular sectors in participatory processes and dialogues with the government for the definition of strategies and policies aiming for change. The challenge of building up Sandinista democracy and popular power declared in the FSLN postulates can be understood from the following passage:

> For the Sandinist Front, democracy is not measured solely in the political sphere, and cannot be reduced only to the participation of the people in elections. Democracy is not simply elections. It is something more, much more. For a revolutionary, for a Sandinista, it means participation of the people in political, social and cultural affairs. The more people participate in such matters, the more democratic they will be. And it must be said once and for all: Democracy neither begins nor ends with elections. It is a myth to want to reduce democracy to that status... To sum up, democracy is the intervention of the masses in all aspects of social life. (FSLN, 1980: 1)

In no country are revolutionary changes carried out by means of applying exported models, although they are obviously influenced and rethought in the light of various ideological currents and practices with common objectives. Moreover, as Gramsci would say, "ideas are not born of other ideas, philosophies of other philosophies: They are a continually renewed expression of real historical development" (Gramsci, 1971: 5). Socialist, democratic, humanist and Marxist ideas, liberation theology, Maoism, the Mexican revolution, Leninism, Ché, Camilo Torres, the conquests and problems of the Cuban revolution and of the countries then called Socialist or Communist, among other ideologies, influenced the thought of but also marked differences with the Sandinismo sustained in Nicaragua's own history.

The popular power conceptualized by the Sandinistas -- within the framework of a mixed economy and a multi-party project -- went beyond liberal discourse. Such discourse speaks in general terms of government of the people, by the

people, and for the people and presumes to attain this by means of formal democracy -- which includes both individual civil rights, like freedom of the press and religion, and representative democracy as the right to elect representatives to state power -- without taking into account that the election of representatives does not necessarily reflect the interests of those who elect them. The electors not only might lack the education and means to understand and express their real interests, but also are subject to influences through the money that facilitates political campaigns and government programs themselves.

For the Sandinistas, popular power referred mainly to the organization of the popular sectors -- which would allow them to express and develop a greater understanding of their needs, interests and particular rights -- and implied their participation in the resolution of their needs together with the government. In order to achieve it, joint spaces for reflection between leaders and subjects, respect for popular knowledge and a greater understanding of micro and macro realities comprising national conditions were needed. These concerns were present in the discourses and debates of popular educators in Latin America. In this sense, the revolutionary project as a whole represented a massive popular education experiment, drawing on lessons obtained in the history of the popular struggle and the triumph of the insurrection.

Therefore, the educational challenge for the Sandinistas, once they were in power, consisted not only of extending access to formal education to historically excluded social groups, but also of recreating the educational conceptions, contents and methodologies in governmental institutions, within mass organizations that emerged with the revolution, and in the Sandinista party.

1. The National Literacy Campaign and Adult Education Program

The "Heroes and Martyrs for the Liberation of Nicaragua" National Literacy Campaign constituted a type of second popular insurrection in the country.[5] Within only fifteen days of the revolutionary triumph, the intention to carry it out was announced. This was a long-time Sandinista dream which came true thanks to the leaders' political decisions and the enthusiasm and willingness of the majority of the population. Antecedents and sources of inspiration were the recent war for liberation, the FSLN proclamations of 1962 and 1965 in which the Sandinistas had promised to launch a literacy campaign, Sandino's own experiences promoting literacy within the ranks of his army, and the words and actions of fallen leaders such as Germán Pomares and Carlos Fonesca, one of the founders of the FSLN who

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[5] For an exhaustive analysis of the Campaign, see: Miller, 1985; Torres, 1985; Arruda, 1981; Vilas, 1982; Assmann, 1981; Cortázar, 1983; Jackson and McFadden, 1981; Lacayo, 1982.

would constantly repeat, "And also teach them to read..." (Barndt, 1991: 33).

During a period of five months, 60,000 people mobilized into literacy fronts, brigades, columns and squads -- military terminology that had been used for organizational and logistical strategy during the insurrection -- all across the country, extending literacy to over 400,000 people. Children and adults from all social sectors who were able to read and write, full of enthusiasm and carrying the Literacy Booklet (Dawn of the People) and the Literacy Teacher's Manual, managed to reduce the illiteracy rate in Nicaragua from 50.2 percent to 12.9 percent.

On March 23, 1980, the brigade members were sworn in and seen off in a gigantic and emotional act in the Plaza de la Revolución. A large blackboard installed in the plaza showed the illiteracy rates by department and blank boxes next to each, awaiting the triumphant statistics that began to come in. As Rosa María Torres wrote beautifully about the process in rural areas:

> From that day on, thousands of new literacy-promoters joined the first contingent. A pair of trousers, a pair of boots, a grey cotton undershirt, a badge of the Crusade, a backpack, a hammock, a gas lamp and the teaching materials was all that accompanied this immense and jubilant literacy army which, day after day, left the cities to share several months with the peasant. Neither the threatening counterrevolutionary propaganda, nor their families' dismay and confrontations managed to discourage the youths. Once in the countryside, the hard life of the peasantry, their poor food and precarious living conditions, the long walks, the severity of the winter, insects, diseases, and the lack of

> electric light and drinking water in many communities did not manage to daunt them either. Even the killings of brigade members at the hands of armed counterrevolutionaries would not do anything but reaffirm these young people's conviction to stay until they had completed their task. (Torres, 1985: 21)

The booklet used in the campaign contained 23 lessons with central themes of the revolutionary program. In it, references were made to historic leaders such as Sandino and Carlos Fonesca; to the role of the FSLN and the people in the victorious insurrection; to the Sandinista Youth, the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, and other mass organizations created by the revolution, and to their role in defense, in production, in austerity and in unity; to education, agrarian reform, health, housing, children's recreation, the "exploitation" of women, democracy, freedom of religious cults, the integration of the Atlantic Coast, and international solidarity.

The Literacy Campaign was understood to be a political act of great consequence and pedagogical innovation. Inspired by the methodology of Paulo Freire, it aimed to teach literacy skills politically and massively to the people, encouraging analysis and reflection over their immediate and national reality, diffusing and discussing the revolutionary project, and promoting the critical participation of the masses in revolutionary tasks. In an experience of unity, joining together literates and illiterates, urban and rural inhabitants, intellectual and manual work, men and women, children, adults and the

elderly, the campaign helped eliminate traditional dichotomies, promoting mutual processes of consciousness-raising between its participants. In this manner, the Crusade contributed to the consolidation of national unity, fusing not only different social sectors of the country but also the Pacific and Atlantic regions, which are divided by ethnic, geographic, historical, social, economic and cultural differences (for instance in gender relations) -- a gap which had become broader due to the lack of mutual knowledge.[6]

The same day that the Literacy Campaign ended, the revolutionary government announced the creation of the Vice-Ministry for Adult Education (VIMEDA) from which the second great educational challenge in the country, the post-literacy campaign, was launched. Almost every afternoon or evening, the recently literate would meet in Popular Education Collectives, under a tree, to the light of a candle, or in their own houses, motivated by the enthusiasm for study that the National Literacy Campaign had suddenly awakened in them.[7] Through this program -- which

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[6] For an overview of the objectives, significance and structure of the Crusade, see: Cuaderno de Educación Sandinista para Capacitadores "Ya es nuestro!"; and Manual del Brigadista, which are listed under Ministry of Education in the Bibliography of this thesis.

[7] In the first semester 143,816 students matriculated in 15,187 Centers of Popular Education; in the second semester 167,852 students in 20,561 Centers; in the third 148,369 in 18,444 Centers; in the fourth 166,208 in 19,056 Centers (Statistics from various official sources of the Ministry of Education between 1981-1983). Although the

was planned "starting from the hypotheses continually confronted with daily practice and without ever losing sight of the revolutionary project as a whole" (Lacayo in Ministerio de Educación, 1981a: 178) -- the new students were given the opportunity to continue their learning gradually through six educational levels with equivalents in the formal national education system.

Out of the dynamic of the program itself and from the popular sectors themselves emerged the Popular Educators, volunteers coordinating the Popular Education Collectives. They were the fundamental subjects of this process, and in some cases had recently become literate through the Campaign. This phenomenon reflected a Revolution full of life, which at the same time presented an internal contradiction between the aspirations of the revolutionary educational project and the backward reality inherited from the days of Somoza (Miller, 1980).

The challenge arose of training Popular Educators in the context of a socio-political-pedagogical process as complex as that of a revolution. How could the Adult

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program continued throughout the period of Sandinista government, the number of participants decreased gradually for various reasons: the difficulties of organizing and administering a permanent program of this magnitude within the framework of an economic block and scarce economic resources; the problems inherent in the articulation of overall contents for national transformation with particular microlocalized needs in the teaching materials; mobilizing popular teachers into training workshops without having the resources for it, etc. However, the limitations imposed by the counterrevolutionary war which intensified as of 1983 without doubt bore the largest impact on the program.

Education program be carried out by Popular Educators who had only completed a few years of primary school (32 percent), the First Level of the program itself (16 percent) or had recently become literate themselves (4 percent) (Torres, 1985: 72)? In addition, they needed to be ready within a few months to coordinate the recently literate returning home after the harvest. In the midst of this tension, heated discussions broke out over whether to creatively design a Nicaraguan alternative or to employ alternative models already in existence. Debates developed over the Cuban, the Soviet and other models presented by UNESCO advisors; the Cuban alternative had most influence. This model had succeeded in teaching people to read and write, but had been limited in the development of a problem-solving education and the fostering of a critical consciousness in its participants.

In order to prepare popular educators, training programs focusing on specific contents were designed, at the expense of pedagogical methodological training. What was fundamentally offered was basic training in certain subjects such as Mathematics, Geography, Grammar, Natural Sciences, etc. which comprised the different levels of the Adult Education Program, with primary school equivalents. In some of these training programs, the popular educators during short, intense periods became students themselves at those levels. Having done so, they could later reproduce them in

the Collectives for Popular Education and carry out their responsibilities with greater skill and confidence.

Confronted with the obstacle of State bureaucracy, the fact that the training lent priority to content, and the limited imaginations or opportunities of central-level personnel, the program gradually began to formalize itself -- that is, it came to mirror the national formal education system. It granted the equivalents of an educational system that itself was in need of profound transformations. In this context, some educators advocated that the Adult Education program be "deformalized," insisting that pedagogical methodological training be given priority -- which at the time was generally implemented in a mechanical way -- and argued that the preparation of teaching materials should be decentralized in order to include specific contents from the various regions and social sectors of the country.[8] Among other things, they advocated that the Collectives for Popular Education be made into bridges toward popular organizations instead of constituting mere spaces of formal education in which primary school degrees could be attained. These critics noted the dangers of departing from the recently literate adults' immediate problems -- the difficulties in organizing for production, harvests, defense, vaccinations, etc. -- and of recreating

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[8] For a closer look at these alternatives, regarding the impact of Adult Education and its role in the Revolution particularly in rural areas, see: Arruda, 1982 and de Montis, 1983.

the traditional teacher and "banking" conception of education (de Montis, 1983).

It became apparent that the method of the Program, drawing from popular education methodology guided by the principle of practice-theory-practice, also needed revision, for it was being inadequately applied in most of the Collectives.[9] This methodology aimed to respond to the fundamental principles of new Nicaraguan education by means of three steps: 1. Observing and analyzing reality; 2. interpreting reality; and, 3. transforming reality. However, Popular Educators were required to apply it without having been adequately trained to do so.[10]

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[9] According to the principle of practice-theory-practice, knowledge is inextricably linked to practice -- that is, to the social, productive, political and cultural activities of individuals. Consciousness, therefore, is a product of those activities. However, though knowledge emerges from social practice, it is only tested once a transformation of that practice occurs. Therefore, although practice serves as a basis for theory, theory, in turn, aids the understanding and transformation of that practice insofar as it is validated by experience (Jara, 1981:28). Consciousness-raising, therefore, is a result of the linkages between practice and theory, of the articulation of different forms of knowledge which, in turn, generate new knowledge required to transform reality.

[10] Within the parameters proposed by Freire himself, the previous training of educators is indispensible for the efficient application of methodology. For some of his ideas about training see: Freire, 1979.

2. Similarities, Contradictions, Dilemmas and Some Silences in the Popular Education Processes in Nicaragua

The Crusade and Adult Education Program -- launched from the Ministry of Adult Education in permanent coordination with the recently created mass organizations -- served as sources of inspiration for the various popular education experiences promoted by mass organizations, by other government institutions, and within the educational instances of the Sandinista party. The UNAG (peasants), the Sandinista Committees of Defense, the ATC (agricultural workers), CST (industrial workers), AMNLAE (Women's Association), ANDEN (educators), FETSALUD (health workers), Sandinista Youth, Ministries of Health and Housing, etc. tried to guarantee the continuity of popular participation in the various actions of revolutionary transformation. All these organizations worked toward the same goal, but did so at varying paces, with myriad innovations and in a context of great limitations, thus challenging the boundaries between possible and impossible. The Ministry of Planning even tried to implement a planning process joining technicians, professionals and popular leaders during the first years of the Revolution.[11]

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[11] I had the opportunity to participate in the design and implementation of this effort when serving as Director of the Department of Social Planning of that Ministry. We tried to achieve the necessary coordination between the various governmental institutions and mass organizations for the joint definition of policies. One of the most serious problems that emerged was that of communication. The popular leaders did not understand the jargon of the

A consciousness-raising process counter-hegemonic to ideologies, values and customs inherited from the Somoza past was promoted in the entire country through various mechanisms -- the different programs of the mass organizations, sporadic mobilizations such as the Health Task Forces, coffee and sugarcane harvests, the government cabinet's weekly "Face the Nation" encuentros and massive national consultations such as for the preparation of the new Constitution and the Principles and Objectives of the New Revolutionary Education.[12] These experiences opened paths and broke traditional schema, increasing popular participation -- a participation geared mainly toward mobilization and consultation which would establish bases for even deeper participation that would include decision-making. However, some Sandinistas argued that the latter would be decisive for the consolidation of the Revolution and that it was necessary to promote greater explorations enabling the creation of new forms, mechanisms, spaces and attitudes towards that end. Although a few experiences were actually developed in which people were able to participate in important decision-making, the

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technicians nor their conceptualizations. In the face of ugencies of production, the war and other conjunctural crises, these leaders told the technicians and professionals that they wanted to dedicate themselves to organizing the people, arguing that that was something in which they had ample experience, and that they trusted in their ability to define development strategies and plans.

[12] For a discussion of the term encuentro (approximately "conference") see footnote 27 of Chapter V.

highest leaders argued that due to the limitations of the war, the lack of education inherent in underdevelopment, and "conjunctural" urgencies, among other things, it was not possible to advance in that direction with greater force.

In the midst of a counterrevolutionary war and tremendous economic limitations -- which resulted in more than 50,000 deaths and material losses worth millions -- the creation of a nationalist popular pedagogy was sought. From a theoretical perspective, it was a question of designing educational programs for a phase of national consolidation and transition toward a more just society, and recognizing the epistemological and political rupture that exists between theory and practice. The challenge consisted of discovering the particular logic of each educational experience and its articulation with an overall vision of transformation. The task was to promote a pedagogy that would facilitate dialogue between teacher and student, between professionals, technicians and the popular sectors, seeking to break with the historical forms of vertical, authoritarian and bureaucratic relations -- although the relationship between the party and the masses or other relations of domination, such as those between men and women, were not questioned. The difficulty lay in defining educational contents which in addition to guaranteeing illiterates the possibility of literacy and referring to their immediate needs of economic survival, would also prompt discussion on pedagogical and methodological problems

-- and on other political problems of participation and democracy. The latter problems would include pompous and submissive attitudes in leaders and subjects, the control of knowledge and ideas, and ways of thinking; in summary, the other complexities of power, which, as Foucault has written, are found everywhere.[13]

According to Foucault, there does not exist a single power location but rather a multiplicity of interconnected locations which reinforce one another and at times find themselves in conflict. In every place -- the family, the workplace, the school, the party, the union, etc. -- there exist the dominant and the dominated. The latter, who are objectified, present particular resistences -- also through silence and absence -- which at times can cause interruptions and displacements, generating ruptures and discontinuities in oppression and opening possibilities for individual, collective, and cultural transformations; changes in the historically constructed male and female identities; and changes in the affectionate, sexual, economic and social dimensions of life.

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[13] "It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another... power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but becomes it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1988-1990: 92-93).

The Sandinista Popular Revolution constituted a historical moment of rupture and change described throughout this work. The educational experiences and attempts at pedagogical recreation in the three locations of power indicated -- the government, the popular organizations and the party -- were heterogeneous processes, full of interruptions and contradictions, both internal and interlocational. Nonetheless, some similarities can be mentioned.

Regarding the contents and methods used -- which can reinforce or impinge upon the power of dominant groups -- a class perspective predominated, at the expense of other power relations between the sexes, ethnic groups, generations, and so on. Programs were directed mainly toward the development of a nationalist, anti-imperialist and anti-Somozan consciousness and line of action and embodied the ideas of Sandino, Carlos Fonseca and other martyred political leaders.

Above all at the beginning of the revolutionary process, Marxist theoretical issues having to do with class formation in Nicaragua and the specific contradictions between capitalists and workers were approached. However, due to the need for alliances inherent in the adopted mixed economy model, these topics, and therefore a greater understanding of this dimension of reality, were gradually limited. In addition, it was argued that these issues might "confuse the people." In the party structure itself, a

sharp turn occurred when the Marxist readings that had played a very important role before the takeover were eliminated soon thereafter.

Educational contents emphasized the resolution of technical and economic needs. It was deterministically believed that the resolution of these would lead to the resolution of others. As the National Leadership of the FSLN would declare in 1980, "Democracy begins in the economic order, when social inequalities begin to diminish, when the workers and peasants improve their standard of living. That is when true democracy begins, not before" (FSLN, 1980: 1). The need for ideological transformations, required precisely for a sustainment, greater development and visions that would transcend these concrete actions for economic survival, were limited. Lacking was a greater theoretical content in educational processes -- knowledge of other experiences of transformation in other countries, conceptualizations, thoughts, ideas, lessons and analytical tools -- which would facilitate an analysis of the many structures and functions of Nicaraguan society and the definition of more coherent strategies for change. "Conjuncturalism" prevailed over strategic thought and it was argued that it could not be any other way, again because of the war and other economic urgencies. There did not seem to be the time -- but nor were extensive efforts made -- to systematize our own experiences in such a way that their analysis would be facilitated. Although there was assumed

to exist a certain learning rhythm for students -- for example, in educational work with the peasantry, when more often than not it was argued, and it is still argued, that they should not be accosted with feminist ideas or with the problems generated by machismo and that reflection over these matters ought to be introduced very slowly -- the country was experiencing a type of accelerated rhythm in face of the "conjunctures."

The lack of a broader theoretical scope over "practice" limited possibilities for articulating knowledge between participants and educators, leaders and subjects, etc. and therefore obstructed the generation of a new and creative learning process that might encourage the transformation of practice. Although experience and "popular knowledge" were recognized, it was the leaders' knowledge that predominated in the orders which they issued and with which people loyally complied. Moreover, "popular knowledge" was in a way mystified and idealized, preventing distinctions between the people's nuclei of "good sense" and "bad sense" and the selection of the former for action. Joint reflection between leaders and subjects would have allowed the comparison, appropriation or rejection of knowledge. A "vanguardist" conception of the party by which its leaders are those who deposit knowledge in the people ("banking" education) prevailed, hampering joint possibilities, between people and their leaders, for generating "organic

intellectuals" to direct common causes.[14] That is to say, there was a contradiction -- albeit not antagonistic -- between the needs of a national leadership and the reproduction of leadership capacities from the grassroots that would have permitted the articulation, through a democratic process, of the particular needs of the grassroots with national needs.[15]

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[14] With regard to this matter, and considering the fact that most of the Sandinista leadership at the highest party and government levels belonged to the petit bourgeois -- it is relevant to reflect over the following viewpoint of Gramsci. He advocates that the members of the petit bourgeois can serve as organic intellectuals of the proletariat but that to do so, they need to adjust their material life conditions to their consciousness. Moreover, even then, he notes that the petit bourgeois are more susceptible to acts of treason and for that reason it is still vital for oppressed groups to have organic intellectuals from their own class extraction (Gramsci, 1971). For a discussion of the different positions taken by Gramsci, Lenin, and Luxemburg regarding the formation of social forces, consciousness, and the relationship of those forces with the party see: Boggs, 1984: 220-227.

[15] Relevant to mention with regard to this matter are the viewpoints of the New Marxist Left, who have raised questions about ends and means. They believe that it is impossible to achieve the end of a participatory democratic socialism with the means of a non-participatory vertical leadership that characterizes the vanguard party. Instead, they believe that a cultural revolution is necessary in which the popular movements create participatory democratic structures within civil society as part of the struggle to seize and maintain State power in order to create a socialist society. In the case of Nicaragua, although the vanguardist conception of the FLSN allowed it to overturn the dictatorship, given certain particularities such as the fact that there was a joint leadership that recognized the people's creative actions and innovations, once in power the dilemma arose of how to recreate this relationship and avoid falling into traditional parameters of the vanguard party. From a psychological perspective and utilizing the tools of Freud and Transactional Analysis, the FSLN acted as the "Good Father" unlike Somoza who constituted a "Bad Father." Although the leaders' adoption of benevolent paternalistic

Opportunities were lost for recreating the conception and exercise of power existing at the time -- the individual seizure of power and its authoritarian and "bureaucratic" (in the negative sense of the word) practice. In other words, the possibilities were limited for thinking of a new "power-with" in contrast to "power-over." Power-with would perhaps imply limited terms and a system of rotations so that people not in leadership positions might also "pass through them," thereby empowering themselves. Moreover, subordinates copied and reproduced authoritarian, bureaucratic and "banking" styles of relations in those dimensions where they were in charge. Although the teachers' and students' ways of relating were discussed, as well as methodologies which would eliminate teachers' traditional attitudes within educational processes as such, the relations between leaders of the Party and its members were not questioned. This necessarily generated deep contradictions and tensions, as Party leaders were ultimately in charge and had a great influence on the style and attitudes of others.

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attitudes and behavior can be understood as an initial strategy for confronting certain culturally defined dependent and submissive attitudes, the Good Father lacked the consciousness needed to strive for permanently overcoming that "Childish" behavior and for a continuous cultural revolution. Such a revolution would allow the emergence and consolidation of the Adult in the psychology of the people and a greater disposition on behalf of the Father to seek out more egalitarian, Adult-Adult ways of relating. However, one would have to see how far the Father would be willing to do this, considering the loss of power implied.

Regarding the subjects involved in popular education processes, more emphasis was placed on the formation of the student than on that of the teacher. The training and performance of the teacher were generally isolated to the management of techniques, dynamics, games, coordination, and leading workshops without developing a greater capability for promoting necessary reflection. In addition, when methodology was undertaken, it was trained and executed in a mechanical way.

The same understanding of "practice" was a dilemma. The idea was to use practice as a point of departure for its later transformation, but its analysis was determined by masculine structures and ways of thinking, focusing on the public sphere and "micro-," specific economic problems without contemplating and equally legitimizing the specificities of gender or other power relations such as those between city and countryside, between ethnic groups, and so on. For example, teaching materials of the Adult Education Program were homogeneous on a national level, thus posing the problem of how to respond to the specific needs and issues of the peasantry, women, workers, villagers, and so on.

Lacking, in addition, were the analytical tools which would allow an understanding and discussion of the complexities of that "Reality"," which also includes dreams, aspirations, emotions -- the psychological aspects of individuals that also lead to empowerment. There was some

reluctance to discuss these other aspects of reality because they were not "rational" and concrete but rather "dispersed" or "dispersing," and were viewed as feminine, unnecessary and secret according to a masculine logic.

Finally, academic research and "scientific knowledge" were hardly promoted in the educational areas of "popular educators." In the context of specific discussions over what popular education is, "popular knowledge" predominated as most important, so that mainly "participatory research" was recognized as the appropriate and adequate way to garner knowledge. Thus, possibilities were limited for uniting approximations of knowledge and for negotiating overall with particular realities to create a new knowledge in order to transform both realities.

Inarguably, the Sandinista Popular Revolution during the eighties, despite enormous concrete limitations, generated great expectations, opened doors, and brought significant changes, mainly in the economic sphere. Although the experience of that period offers complex understandings, innovations and lessons for popular education, the analysis above aims to enrich that understanding by pointing out some instances of silence: unawareness and limitations in the consciousness of the subjects of change themselves -- both leaders and people -- and in the efforts toward its deconstruction. Its deconstruction was needed in order to produce the "insurrection of consciousness" referred to by Orlando

Núñez, the strength, enthusiasm, dreams and will to overcome grievances suffered by the oppressed (Núñez, 1988).

In relation to men, women experience particular forms of oppression. The following chapters will expose these various forms of oppression that women in Nicaragua are subjected to as well as the advances and dilemmas that have emerged in their struggle for liberation. Their "reality," which is experienced in both the public and private realms, constitutes the point of departure for an education that aims for the insurrection of their consciousness and advocates profound societal transformations.[16]

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[16] The following chapters are based on academic research conducted in CENZONTLE, Centro Para la Participación Democrática y el Desarrollo (the Center for Democratic Participation and Development) by researchers Mercedes Olivera, Mark Meassick and Malena de Montis during the final months of 1989 and the first months of 1990, coordinated by de Montis in Nicaragua. The results of this research can be utilized, discussed, verified or rejected by women participating in various popular education processes. In this manner, academic research is safeguarded and validated, while in many instances, as has been noted, academic research has been devalued and contrasted with "participatory research" in certain debates among popular educators in Latin America. The results obtained in this type of research are important and necessary for facilitators or popular educators to be able to share insights on the pedagogical action that they develop.

PART II

WOMEN IN NICARAGUA: A FIRST STEP TOWARD CREATING A FEMINIST APPROACH TO POPULAR EDUCATION

CHAPTER IV

PRIVATE LIFE: STRUCTURAL BASE OF GENDER SUBORDINATION

A. The Historical Legacy of Women: Domestic Imprisonment

Women's "domestic" fate is clearly a form of imprisonment. In Nicaragua 81 percent of the women over 16 years of age have children, 60 percent live with a partner and almost all undeniably fulfill household duties: 54 percent do so as housewives and 42 percent, in addition to the obligations which tie them to the home, earn income through one or several jobs. Only a small minority (4 percent), the majority of whom are single and study or work full time, state that they do not have domestic obligations (Cenzontle, 1989).

This domestic fate is a social fact that has been imposed on women historically since and perhaps even before the appearance of agricultural and herding societies. It is not a natural situation nor one chosen by them. As Meillasoux suggests, decisions regarding the female fate started being made when groups of people, out of the need to defend their territory, began to realize they must guarantee their own reproduction. As land became more than a mere possession but also a means of social production and as the power of social groups began to be measured by the number of members, women were obtained forcibly through abduction and war in order to "produce" the numbers needed (Meillasoux, 1979).

"Abduction already contains and sums up all the elements of the enterprise of women's inferiorization and is a prelude to all the others" (Meillasoux, 1979: 161). Since then, "women's salvation is not to be found in resistance, but rather in submission to their abductors" (Meillasoux, 1979: 162). Women were secluded under masculine control and vigilance in domestic life, required to carry out the least gratifying work, and consequently were excluded from warfare and hunting--the activities through which men affirmed their superiority over the "weaker" members of the group: women, slaves, children, and the elderly. In The Creation of Patriarchy, Gerda Lerner argues that the development of slavery as a way to increase agricultural production involved women as the first slaves, concubines and wives; it was easier to coopt women as slaves captured in war if they were raped and had children by their owners, whereas male slaves could more readily run away or rebel (Lerner, 1986).

As agriculture became more important than hunting and could provide nourishment for larger and more complex configurations of people, it was possible to protect the "producers" from the risks incurred by abductions. Less violent matrimonial regulations or norms were gradually established through a civil power capable of negotiating a political interchange of women. In addition to controlling the means of immediate reproduction, such as food, land, pastures, water, etc., the civil and gerontocratic power of

these domestic communities came to control more effectively the means of social reproduction: the women (Grassi, 1986).

Farming communities established relations for the interchange of adolescent females forming alliances and affinities that often extended over time until various communities merged under the patriarchal authority of the strongest one. This social structure required ideologies and rituals to legitimate the imposition of civil power and matrimonial norms; religion, magic, myths, beliefs and superstitions fulfilled this function and were aimed at controlling the subordinated members, acquiring special forms for women at the time of their first menstruation. In the treatment of these subordinated groups members civil and religious prohibitions, social hierarchies, and external power symbols demanded by dominating groups in order to exercise economic, political, and military rule were clearly defined and amplified.

Women's sexuality and fertility were strictly controlled and alienated during the reproductive period of their lives -- first by parents and thereafter by husbands -- so that they achieved a certain independence only in old age, most commonly as widows. The power of the patriarch was measured by the number of his dependents, that is, those who belonged to his lineage, which was a function of the number of fertile women in the group. Often the importance of controlling women's sexuality was related to the women's

particular lineage. In many societies, as in prehispanic Mesoamerica, belonging to the calpulli (clan) of the pilis (nobles) was a precondition for gaining access to land, tributes of the macehuales (aristocrats) and power (Olivera, 1978; Monzón, 1983). A man would therefore marry a woman from a particular pilis in order to acquire her lineage inheritance.

For aeons, production and reproduction have been closely linked with land and ancestry. Control over women's reproductive capability was instituted in order to guarantee that land would be kept in the same family generation after generation. Women specialized in social reproduction and in all the domestic tasks, while the privileges of decision-making in production and participating in public life were defined as activities of men. With the gendered division of labor and the exclusion of women from the public structures of power, the patriarchal nature of social structures was confirmed. In fact, those structures have lasted until the present day and continue to define and determine the differentiated roles for men and women, as well as the subordination of women to masculine power.

Specialized for so many centuries in the tasks of biological and social reproduction, women not only occupy a role different from that of men but also receive unequal and discriminatory treatment. Subordinated to masculine powers and segregated from public life through various modes of

production and diverse social formations, they have like snails always carried their homes on their shoulders.

In Nicaragua the subordination of women's daily domestic life corresponds basically to the biological and social reproduction needs of dependent and underdeveloped capitalism. It is a system in which the reproduction of society rests on the modern version of the domestic community: the theoretically monogamous family.

Nicaraguan families still preserve many of the objective and subjective elements of peasant families, unlike those of the capitalist system's major countries which, in addition to being monogamous, have lost their functions as units of production while retaining their reproductive ones. The agro-export economy which characterizes Nicaragua, far from ending the patriarchal/servile colonial forms of productive and reproductive relations, has reapplied them for the benefit of the landed class and imperialist domination.

The system of peonage and semiproletarization imposed since the seventeenth century on Nicaraguan land through the multi-integrated colonial mode of production acquired special characteristics upon combining the polygamous customs of _caribes_ and _nicaraos_ (indigenous groups) with the needs of the Spanish Crown.[1] The latter demanded an

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[1] Semiproletarization refers to the temporary work done by a peasant periodically in _fincas_ and _haciendas_ in exchange for wages. The landowners benefit not only from the availability of cheap labor, but also from sparing

increase in the number of its tribute payers and in manpower for the plantation-mercantile system, urging a model of rapid societal reproduction to replenish the population lost to the conquest, to plagues, and to their own overexploitation of the natives on the landed estates, thus assuring the replication of the system of colonial domination.

The rapid reproduction of the population, based on economic necessity, was probably based on the polygamous norms of the prehispanic family and on colonial conventions. These allowed women, mothers-wives-property, to comply with their role with such a degree of success that the population of Nicaragua more than doubled between 1684 and 1806 (Romero, 1988).[2] Cultural standards allowed great sexual freedom, considered especially valid and justified for men, and other reproductive norms often charged with violence, such as landowners' rapes of peasant women, which coupled gender subordination with colonial domination.

The repopulation of Nicaragua very soon blurred ethnic boundaries. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the

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themselves the cost of its reproduction, which comes at the expense of the peasant communities and especially the women's work (Semo, 1978).

[2]According to the aforementioned author, at the beginning of the eighteenth century there had been 4,834 subjects and by 1806 there were 10,045 in accordance with contemporaneous polls and information of the province's governor. The population increase occurred principally in the Pacific zones where the most important Spanish haciendas were located.

ladinos or mestizos, products of the legally sanctioned intermixing and of the rapes of indigenous women, constituted an important portion of the total population. By the time of national independence, they had become a majority, despite never having been included specifically in the colonial juridical norms. Many lived without occupations or benefits in the Indian communities or in the cities, where they were ostracized. Others lived dispersed in the hidden "valleys," tilling small plots of land and working independently for subsistence since they were subjects without rights, alienated from the public goods and outsiders in the land of their birth (Romero, 1988).[3] Undoubtedly, this situation also had a negative influence on the forms of subordination that were later inherited.

The Spanish population established in Nicaragua during the Colony was predominantly male; blacks and mulattos, brought to work on the sugar plantations at the disposal of the Crown were few. In this way, repopulation necessarily implied a high rate of fertility and a strong process of mestizaje (miscegenation) not only between Spaniards and Indian and mulatto women, but also between the different ethnic groups that inhabited the country; this ethnic mixing was particularly prominent between laborers and day workers

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[3] On the eve of Independence, Subtiaba was the only Indian tribe without ladinos that remained in the Pacific region, despite the Indian Laws that prohibited Spaniards, ladinos or blacks from living in their communities (Romero, 1988).

of the farms in the Pacific area.[4] Romero proposes the existence of a reproductive pattern that not only was imposed and stimulated, but also involved a great number of extramarital relations, principally among the ladinos, in which feminine hypergamy (numerous successive partners) caused the confusion of ethnicities, from which some mestizos and mulattos gained an advantage (Romero, 1988). Among black women the situation was also very violent, given their condition of slavery. The owners of women slaves used them for reproduction: they allowed them to have a very dissolute sex life so that they would have children as slavery was inherited through the mother.[5]

The predominant sexual liberty created a socially accepted pattern of behavior -- although it originally had been imposed -- involving great subordination of women. This subordination was fundamentally due to the women's use as reproducers of the labor force which resulted in the devaluation of women's sexuality.[6] Furthermore, the sexual liberty also contradicted the repressive norms of religious

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[4] Day workers, jornaleros, are workers who do not reside on the property being farmed. Laborers, peones, live on the farms.

[5] A colonial chronicle affirms that a woman slave of reproductive age was more expensive and appreciated "like mares in Spain" (Romero, 1988: 107) Nevertheless, some could obtain their liberty through concessions of their master's Will when they had been born in the house and probably were his own offspring.

[6] "Sexuality" holistically refers to biological and psychological functions and implications.

origins that had been implanted during the period, thereby increasing women's internal conflicts.

In Nicaragua various forms of domination were combined including gender subordination, class exploitation and ethnic discrimination. In colonial society, which was already highly stratified in the eighteenth century, the Indians lived in communities where they had been placed to enhance the political and tributary control. Peasant families generally were formed by various nuclei of patrilineal descent, but also included single mothers resulting from rapes and the colonists' derecho de pernada over the Indian laborers.[7] The services and repartimientos [see below] were also elements that favored mestizaje and multiple relations, inasmuch as husband and wife spent long periods of time apart (Zavala and Miranda, 1954).

The double day also made its imprint on the culture. Women were obliged to render services or tequio as part of tributes to authorities. They took turns performing unpaid domestic labor for officials, landholders and clergymen, who often established some form of sexual relation with them that was always disadvantageous for the women. They also participated in the repartimientos, the compulsory work that the communities alternated in executing at the Spanish haciendas and companies, for which the Indians received a minimal salary. Women were contracted to prepare meals for

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[7] The derecho de pernada was a feudalistic "right to exploit" claimed by the colonists.

the laborers during the sowing, harvest and slaughter seasons, or were required to work as weavers for the colonial officials' textile companies. In these they were paid according to the quantity and quality of what they produced with their backstrap looms, leaving "abundant profits" for their masters.[8]

These jobs implied the burden of a double day originating from the economic logic of colonial domination, but also serving as a selective punishment for those Indian women who committed sexual transgressions. That was the case for the single women who had illicit relations with married Indian men. As a result the weavers' houses had a bad reputation (Zavala and Miranda, 1954).

In colonial times there were "house" women, Indian or black, who rendered services in the houses and _haciendas_ of the Spaniards in exchange for their room and board, and who frequently were used as "initiators" and concubines by the master's sons. Already in colonial documents referring to the _ladino_ sector there appears a modern linguistic formula that declares that a woman "_le tiene un hijo a fulano_," an expression which conveys a sense of women's sexual servility

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[8] In Subtiaba around 1776, "magistrate Landecho delivered money and cotton to the local Indian authorities so that they would distribute them among the Indian women." Some wove in their houses, others in the houses of the weaving masters who worked for the magistrate. "...[I]n all of the magistracy there must have been 574 Indian women spinning and weaving cotton for the magistrate" (Romero, 1988: 80).

to men.[9] Then, Indian and black women had the right to bring charges against their rapists, unlike the ladinas, among whom the sexual model of multiple relations held fast despite the Christian culpability in which transgressions took place (Romero, 1988).

It was during the Colony that the most important features of couple relationships found today in Nicaragua were formed. Motherhood and domestic work, in addition to the seclusion of women in the confines of their houses, have both stimulated and repressed their sexuality, favoring paternal irresponsibility and machismo. The deep roots of this phenomenon in colonial life explain the contradictory and persistent nature of multiple sexual relations, as well as the patriarchal and authoritarian forms of personal and societal relations today.

B. The Current Situation for Women: Serving Others

Motherhood, the functioning of the family, and the anti-economical population growth that exists in Nicaragua -- as in all developing nations which retain a high rate of growth both despite and as a result of their poverty -- constitute some of the cultural elements which contribute significantly to the current degree of women's subordination.

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[9] Literally, this expression of common usage means to "bear a child to whomever," and implies that women's sexuality merely has an instrumental and servile function for reproduction. (She is not bearing the child to herself.)

Biological reproduction, a natural female function, fulfils the societal objective of maintaining the labor force required particularly by the agro-exporting companies -- not only in the necessary numbers, but also at an insignificant expense to the companies. This phenomenon, as demonstrated, has precise historical antecedents and matches the agro-export economic paradigm which now finds itself in crisis. It is perpetuated unconsciously by the population, reinforced by ideological models, myths and beliefs, while it reflects the social differences and contradictions originated by the unequal capitalist development in the country.

In Nicaragua the natural population growth rate is quite high. It increased from 2.8 percent annually between 1975 and 1980 to 3.3. percent annually between 1980 and 1985, probably as a result of the historically high rate of fertility, in addition to the decrease in infant mortality rates from 120 to 76.4 deaths per 1000 children between the years of 1975 and 1985, as a result of the health measures and preventive care promoted by the Sandinista government (SPP-ESDENIC, 1989).

Women bear an average of 5.5 children, considered one of the highest of such statistics in Latin America. Most commonly from rural areas, the who have the most children also have little or no education and receive minimum income. They bear an average of two or three more children than their urban counterparts, though their infants also die more

frequently due to the poor living conditions. As many as 48 percent of all rural children are raised under meagre nutritional conditions (SPP, 1988a; Cenzontle, 1989).

The remarkable fertility of Nicaraguan women has been encouraged by various religious ideologies, particularly by the predominant Christian ideology which is rooted particularly in the rural population. In this ideological context, women are considered to be slaves to men and sexual relations are identified exclusively with motherhood, as has been expressed by various women: "to serve one's husband (sexually) is decreed by God" and "having sexual relations with my husband is only in order to have another kid."[10] Indeed, the failure to have children due to sterility or other reasons is often a motive behind marital separation, and the wife is returned to her parents, for she is considered useless although she might not be the one responsible for the lack of progeny (Taller Cenzontle-UNAG, 1989). In the countryside the idea also pervades that many children should be raised so that parents will not become impoverished in their old age. However, poverty is generalized, and contrary to this belief it is the families with more than five children who are the poorest (Cenzontle, 1989).

The prevention of pregnancy is not a practice common among the population nor one generally accepted in society.

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[10] Anonymous interviews were conducted through Cenzontle in 1989.

During the last years of the past decade oral contraceptives were distributed. Unionized women workers, for example, began to voice demands in their assemblies for the inclusion of contraceptives in the canasta básica (minimum basket of goods) and for access to sex education, raising both requests in the public enterprise labor agreements (ATC, 1988a; Central Sandinista de Trabajadores, 1989). These women want to know how they can conceive only the children they choose to have voluntarily and are able to provide for, which could indicate that a struggle has broken out in Nicaragua to regain women's alienated reproductive rights--an important step in regaining also women's alienated sexuality.

While this struggle begins, current statistics show that only 30 percent of Nicaraguan women use contraceptives and a majority of them already have between two and four children. Twenty percent state that they do not use them for reasons of health or religious belief, but the majority (68 percent), older than 16 years of age, state they do not use them because they do not know about them, do not have a partner, or do not have permanent relationships (Cenzontle, 1989). These statistics seem to present a picture which would not impede the new struggle to regain women's aliented reproductive rights; nonetheless, what prevails is the general notion that the use of contraceptives and particularly abortion constitute "mortal sin."

The need to use contraceptives increased in urgency during the Sandinista government, even in the countryside, despite men's strong opposition. As a female agricultural worker from Estelí reported: "I have to hide the pills among the beans so that my husband won't find them." Men are strongly opposed to female contraceptives and generally refuse to use condoms. When pregnancy is avoided, it is because the woman has taken precautions. All the same, more and more women engage in family planning or undergo an operation, risking to be considered "wenches" by men, who continue to feel the need to secure progeny by appropriating women's fertility through successive pregnancies (Taller Cenzontle-AMNLAE, 1989).[11]

Meanwhile, the campaign initiated by certain women for the legalization of abortion highlights the progress that has been made and the challenges that have yet to be overcome (See: Chamorro, 1989; Murguialday, 1990). The ignorance around and subordination of feminine sexuality result in a high number of unwanted pregnancies, and since abortion remains illegal, women resort to clandestine methods. Abortions are the primary cause of death among mothers in the country, increasing from 10 deaths per ten

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[11] According to a survey conducted by Cenzontle in 1989, 6 percent of all women are sterilized. The majority of them are found in region 4, where the Sociedad Demográfica (Demographic Society) has worked for more than a decade. The ovarian duct operation is popularly known as "cancellation," a denomination which implies strong repression of the sterilized woman's sexuality.

thousand children born alive in 1983 to 26.56 such deaths in 1985. This rate is very high as compared with countries where abortion is legal such as the United States, where the corresponding mortality rate over the same period was 0.8 (Pizarro, 1988a, 1988b, 1989).

The majority of the women who abort have had two or more children and have had recourse to abortion mainly for economic reasons, because they have been abandoned by their partners or because they have a large family. Of those who underwent an illegal abortion in 1988 only 23 percent were single, suggesting that social factors related to one's reputation are not the most common incentive. Abortion is not considered a right. Deciding how many children to have and when to have them is not associated with women's rights due to prevailing cultural -- particularly religious -- values.

Nicaraguan women are unquestionably destined to become mothers, although the inequality between the sexes is not derived solely from that condition, but rather from the unequal distribution of responsibilities dictated by current cultural patterns. From the time they are little, girls aspire to the ideal of belonging to some man: "marrying and having all the children that God sends us" (Cenzontle, 1990), while men, dedicated exclusively to the public realm, aspire to possess those girls, impregnate them and have them care for a family. Eighty-one percent of women over 16 years old have an average of more than three (surviving)

children (Cenzontle, 1989). In addition, due to the rapid population growth, there is a large pool of young mothers. Forty percent of all mothers are between 16 and 25 years and have one child on average; 67 percent of women with a partner are younger than 35 years of age and have an average of 3.2 children; and women older than that generally have between four and six children (Cenzontle, 1989).

Women are taught from childhood to overvalue motherhood, to carry "the ring on the finger... and the broom in the hand," (Kirkwood, 1985). The great majority of the mothers recognize "that children are a great source of pleasure, frequently the greatest pleasure in a woman's life" (Cenzontle, 1990), but it is practically impossible for them "to balance their advantages and burdens carefully due to the mythology of motherhood and the series of pronatalist cultural pressures" (Gordon, 1979: 25). Women without children often suffer social rejection or feel like failures themselves, unlike men in the same situation (Gordon, 1979).

Women enjoy their motherhood role because it enables them to have loving and sexual experiences and certain quotas of power as administrators and organizers of the children's' lives, which they do not find easily otherwise.[12] Therefore, in terms of motherhood, women

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[12] Sexuality is defined not only in reference to coitus but also as the affectionate energy in and between people. For example, mothers feel sexual pleasure when they nurse or caress their children and the latter also establish

characterize housework and childcare as a female obligation.[13] Unlike all other domestic tasks, childrearing, despite all its inherent difficulties, offers important emotional rewards: the recognition of a status that is denied to single women, a secure source of emotional support during their children's early years, a form of control over the conditions of domestic labor, and a very concrete sense of existence inasmuch as the children are central to their lives. The great majority of Nicaraguan women who work outside the home do so out of a pressing need to provide for their offspring, rather than as an escape from childcare, their household labor, or a need to acquire personal fulfilment in another way (Taller Cenzontle-ATC, 1990; CST, 1990).

These attitudes and maternal emotions forming part of the cultural configuration of the female gender constitute, in turn, part of women's identity, generating a mystique around motherhood which helps to maintain male supremacy through the gendered division of labor. That is, women seek personal fulfilment and define their feminine condition through motherhood. Furthermore, due to social pressure and/or to the cultural conditioning of the women's consciousness, any transgression of that role imbues them

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a sexual-affectionate relationship with their mother.

[13] Domestic responsibilities include childcare and housework -- e.g. cleaning, cooking, shopping, and laundering.

with guilt. Childrearing and housework thereby turn into both a form of imprisonment and the most salient indicator of their subordination which in order to be withstood require precisely the mystification of the maternal role.

The high fertility rate, young maternity age, and single motherhood have been fostered by a machista ideology prevailing in society, which accepts the notion that men naturally possess a "strong and uncontrollable sexuality" (Taller Cenzontle-Amas de casa, 1990). On the other hand, a majority of the women live alienated from their bodies -- which must fulfil the primordial function of procreation -- and repress their own sexuality:

> The woman is a passive being, not because she wants it that way, but because our society and reality impose it on us. Men decide over us. I don't think any woman and if so only a few dare to ask a man to take them when they feel desire. He would reject them, but the most serious thing is that we don't dare to take pleasure in sexual relations... (Taller Cenzontle-AMNLAE, 1990).

In many cases, women strive to satisfy men, forgetting about themselves (IXCHEN, 1989).

The sexual subordination of women is also reflected by the obligation which many of them feel to "desquitar" in bed the money they receive from their partners to provide for their children.[14] The expression "desquitar," used very frequently in reference to the relation between spouses or companions, implies an interchange or sale: the rendering

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[14] The word, with no English equivalent, approximately means "to repay."

of services and sexual pleasure in exchange for small sums of money. Women's defenselessness against this dependence, which approaches a form of prostitution, is disguised and made acceptable by the religious value attributed to man's ownership of woman, even when there are no affectionate bonds that unite them. Even worse, this conception requires many women to accept abuse and other forms of violence as a marital obligation.

The formation of roles and identities through culture implies a whole series of impositions, justified in myths and beliefs, that compel individuals to act in a predetermined manner. Along these lines, rather than constituting a pleasurable encounter, sex has largely turned into a battlefield where it is necessary, almost compulsory, to win and come out triumphant. Instead of having harmonious sexual relations, a sexophobic culture has developed in the country, in which the sexuality of men is an obsessive and quantifiable ritual: show greater passion and desire, take the initiative, have sex rapidly, immediately and without concern for the partner (Castillo, 1990).

This attitude towards sex not only erodes and distorts the emotional state of the individual and the couple but also is regarded by men, whether consciously or subconsciously, as a way of dominating women figuratively and literally. In correlation, women mechanically identify the sexual act with love and the obligation to have all the

children they conceive, generating a dilemma which is not only moral but also political.[15] The implicit act of possession subordinates woman, relegating her to copulate only with her husband, to bear his children and to be a "casta mujer de su casa"" (Castillo, 1990).[16] This sexual culture of servility for women and great "passion" for men justifies in great measure a double moral standard that deems it acceptable for men to engage in multiple relations, but condemnable for women to do the same.

Apparently, there is conjugal stability in Nicaragua in accordance with the cultural ideal -- to be married with children -- which is assumed by women as their principle existential purpose. Sixty percent of women over 16 years of age in Nicaragua live with a partner; of the rest, 24 percent are single and 16 percent are widows, divorced or separated. Combined, these last two statistics shake the myth of conjugal stability by presenting the fact that 40 percent of Nicaraguan women live outside of the cultural ideal.

Furthermore, in Nicaragua monogamous relationships are rare. Often one hears that men as well as women "se las

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[15] The situation mirrors a North American adage: "Men learn to fall in love with the women they are attracted to; women learn to be attracted to the men they are in love with" (Sex, Lies, and Videotape, film, 1989).

[16] Expression which means "chaste woman of his home."

pegan."[17] The fact that women accept having permanent conjugal relations with a married man -- or have struck a corresponding family agreement -- and that adult men have relationships with several women at the same time is so common that it merits an attempt at explanation. Irreconcilible with the Christian family ideal prevailing in Nicaraguan culture, "irregular" situations have emerged, such as the large number of women living in "informal or free" arrangements, appearing to cast the ideal into a crisis; forty percent of all women living with a partner are not married (Cenzontle, 1989).

However, because such bigamous or multiple relationships have endured for generations, are widespread, and are reluctantly condoned by many women, they have been endowed with such a degree of legitimacy that they might almost be considered a characteristic endemic to the Nicaraguan family ideal itself. There is a legal and juridical surface appearance of monogamy, but an actually polygamous reality. This hidden form of polygamy, which by not corresponding with the established monogamous ideal, retains a negative social image. Nonetheless, it is an inexorable reality for many of the women in Nicaragua who have lived with a partner for more than two or three years and have children.

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[17] A popular phrase used in Nicaragua to designate adulterers.

This family situation, with its many nuances, is imposed on women by their partners, who take advantage of the vulnerability stemming from the women's economic and emotional dependence. They do not have any choice but to submit to him or subject themselves and their children to desertion. The discriminatory social distribution of roles explains several things: the children belong with their mother, who "le tiene hijos," bears children to her husband, so that all negative consequences fall on her: child neglect; an excessive burden of household labor; limitations on development; physical exhaustion; and confinement in the small world of the family home and neighborhood.[18] The men, on the other hand, have an entire world open in front of them. Nothing ties them to the home, as even the daily household expenses are covered by the women themselves. Nevertheless, each expects the man to come through with solutions to the problems of the family of which he is the "boss," always hoping that he will not have forgotten the appropriation he consummated upon making her a mother.

Due to this social and emotional dependency on on the males, multiple relations end up being tacitly accepted. After a more or less brief period of jealousy or instability at the threat of losing whatever economic, emotional and sexual support exists, the women involved in the relation --

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[18] Again, this is an expression of common usage which expresses the servility of women's reproductive ability. Literally, it means that a woman "bears children to her man," i.e. not to herself.

the lover(s) and the wife or life companion -- come to accept or at least tolerate one another in their new assigned roles. The fact that the family units are kept apart and not in the same house allows them to readjust their conjugal relationship. Pretending to ignore each other's existences, the two or more women of a man "accept" what he gives them, although the one who receives the least is the "first one," who generally is older than the others and often ends up living alone. The couples change so quickly, though, that soon the second woman also becomes a single mother. In this manner the women get entangled in a complicated system of informal relations and multiple pregnancies, principally as single mothers or unmarried mothers living with a partner.

These family situations heighten the patriarchal and hierarchical nature of social relations that reproduce the subordination and dependence of women. From an economic point of view, the women work outside of the home to complement or even provide their partner's financial contribution, without ceasing to comply with their household obligations. From an emotional point of view, the mother becomes the main or only source of security for her children.

The centrality of the bond between mother and child based on emotional dependence legitimates her authority and power over them while at the same time it opens possibilities for them to become subjects in the recreation

of the culture, replicating the differential socialization of sons and daughters, and so on. It is hard for their rebellion to materialize due to the profound difficulties of breaking out of their asymmetrical relation vis-á-vis men: insecurity, guilt, fear, etc. Rather, women in those situations generally dedicate themselves passionately to their children and reproduce with them the vertical and authoritarian patterns of their subordination. The children, in turn, encounter numerous examples of the patriarchal ideology not only at home but also in school and through the mass media, all of which contribute to upholding the structure of personal as well as political and economic relations of domination in the national context.

Despite the apparent "normality," men's multiple relations are experienced ambivalently by women, either openly or intimately. As it does not coincide with the marital ideal, the situation remains hidden and neither socially nor institutionally legitimate, sparking instances of mistrust, deceit, blackmail and revenge which tend to turn into a morbid and masochistic constant for couples. The two, three, or more women involved with a single man live in a constant state of dispute over sexual and affectionate favors from the man, as well as over his economic contribution to their homes. In order to "tie him down," they make use of their sexuality, their youth, emotional blackmail and even witchcraft, all of which expose their vulnerability.

The outcome of the competition between them turns out to be further disadvantageous for the women and results in the affirmation of male superiority. The disputes between them and their submission to machismo satisfy the masculine ego. In addition, this competition yields "losers" among the women, emotional weariness and often very serious emotional and sexual frustration. Above all, however, it causes a self-devaluation of their sexuality that they frequently try to compensate for by engaging in mistaken behavior: child abuse, condemnable sexual licentiousness, alcoholism, pregnancies for the sake of punishment, etc..

Some women do manage to distance themselves from these relations at least temporarily. They generally return to their parents' home with the children until they initiate a new conjugal cycle, increasing the number of extended families in Nicaragua.

It could be said that two family situations coexist in the reproductive culture of Nicaraguan society, spanning all groups and social classes and appearing in different forms and with significant nuances in the countryside and the city: nuclear families and extended families. Combined, alternating and contradictory forms of monogamy and polygyny -- relationships between one man and various women -- are established in both of them, deepening women's subordination by binding them even more tightly to their maternal function since they have to shoulder some or all of the family

obligations not dealt with by the men.[19] Upon the absence of the "boss" of the family -- for one reason or another -- women need to assume that role in addition to their own.[20]

The symbiotic persistence of both family situations -- situations constructed out of the culture shock between indigenous patriarchal formations and the patriarchal values imposed by the dominating classes during more than three centuries of Spanish rule -- has developed in close connection with the failure by agro-export capitalism to generate patterns of co-habitation that include the stable presence of a man in the house. Nuclear families constitute 61 percent of the cases, made up of an often absent father, a mother, and children. Extended families account for 39 percent of the cases, half of them with a single mother and an average of eight members: the father, the mother, unmarried sons, unmarried daughters with children, grandchildren and eventually a son-in-law or someone else (Cenzontle, 1989). In both situations the permanent or temporary absence of the man results in an incomplete family unit.

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[19] More than 50 percent of the family units in Nicaragua state that they suffer from this problem (Cenzontle, 1989).

[20] Thirty-six percent of women over 16 years of age are heads of their households and 11 percent rely exclusively on themselves (Cenzontle, 1989).

It is relevant to point out, however, that during the last decade fathers' absences owed not only to the multiple relations that we have analyzed, but also to the high human cost of the war unleashed in Nicaragua, financed by the United States government. The war decimated the predominantly male labor force by 20 percent, and consumed 50 percent of the national budget for several years (SPP, 1988b).

The objective reality of exacerbated machismo and women's subordination in the private sphere tends to be hidden by an image that many women project of themselves as independent, free, and liberated. Nevertheless, the contradiction between that stated image and cultural norms and expectations is clearly expressed subjectively in women's wishes and perspectives which unmask many of the stated projections. Further contradictions between what is desired as ideal and what is experienced in family life as reality, as well as between varying levels of consciousness over oppression, are obvious.

Nicaraguan women, with very few exceptions, do not consider their various activities in the home to be work; when surveyed, they include the even informal work that they perform in the "non-work" category. This demonstrates an unconscious self-exploitative ideology with which the Nicaraguan family unit -- often headed by themselves -- resolves the domestic economic problem. Only 18 percent of all women older than 16 years of age in the country state

that their husbands help them with housework, and then only occasionally. However, 83 percent think that men should cook and clean and 59 percent feel that the man should share childcare responsibilities and that both parents should decide how many offspring to have. An average of 75 percent of the women affirm that other people, mainly men, make decisions for them regarding their studies, jobs, excursions, and even their vote in national elections. Ninety-six percent hold that men have no right to mistreat women and only 13 percent accept abuse from their partners. At the same time, 77 percent feel that wives should obey their husbands and 74 percent feel that men and women should not be granted the same sexual liberties (Cenzontle, 1989).

C. Imposed Single Motherhood is Not Liberation

More than a third of Nicaraguan women with children live without a partner and a large majority of those who do have a partner find that their companion assumes few responsibilities. In addition, contrary to what one would expect to find in a highly Christian society,[21] there are few formally institutionalized marriages in the country resulting in a large number of illegitimate children -- the majority of these children not only live without fathers,

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[21] In Nicaragua, 83 percent of the women state that they are Catholic, 12 percent are Evangelists or of other Christian denominations and 5 percent declare no religious affiliation (Cenzontle, 1989).

but were also denied legal recognition until the last decade.[22]

The condition of single motherhood in which many Nicaraguan women find themselves may generate positive interpretations because of the apparent greater freedom in the absence of the men and the role that women can take on as "bosses of their homes." As might be expected, these single women make decisions with a greater sense of independence and exercise their rights more militantly than do mothers living with a partner. A significantly greater proportion of them work and belong to organizations although those who live in their parents' homes, as will be shown below, frequently are subjected to a higher degree of control: "They treat us as if we were little girls, maybe because they are worried we might get pregnant again" (Taller Cenzontle-MINSA, 1990).

These single women are not sexually liberated nor particularly empowered. On the contrary, their subordinated position is maintained and takes on new dimensions when they are not able, either technically or emotionally, to confront life alone, and when they have children to provide for. They experience strong internal conflicts resulting from profound feelings of guilt and failure at not having lived

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[22] The Sandinista government, at the request of organized women, issued several special laws such as the law recognizing the equality of all children and the rights of women in relationships regardless of their marital status, and the Law of Nurturing requiring fathers to take responsibility for their children (Vargas, M., 1989b).

up to the ideal of the husband and wife united "'til death do us part" according to the decrees of the dominant Catholic Church.

A majority of single working mothers carry out two or three daily shifts. They do not have the same employment opportunities as men.[23] Due to their minimal educational background, most dedicate themselves mainly to informal occupations, predominantly small businesses and services. In addition, despite the family laws issued during the ten years of Sandinista rule, which are not easily enforced, the fathers' irresponsibility is a constant complement to their great physical and emotional weariness. Meanwhile, although they may have ended their relationship, the previous partners exhibit an uncontrolled, violent, and disrespectful sexual impulse toward the mother's of their children whom they regard as their property -- for having "let themselves get pregnant." If the women turn down the men's sexual advances, which are often made in a state of drunkenness, the women become victims of abuse, rape and even homicide (Talleres Cenzontle, 1990b).

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[23] Thirty-nine percent of single mothers state that their main occupation is the home; however, 75 percent also work outside the home. Only 5 percent have launched a technical or professional career and 38 percent cannot read or have attended primary school for only two or three years. In the capital of Managua, educational attainment rates are a little higher -- generally amounting to the completion of primary school -- and women's occupations are more diversified. However, the majority of domestic employees are single mothers (Cenzontle, 1989).

Many women who do not find a stable relationship within their first marriage and suddenly find themselves alone with their children return to live with their mothers, who are frequently single mothers themselves, and who show solidarity by helping their daughters.[24] This solidarity is what allows some young women to continue their studies, or more commonly to work, in order to provide for their children. However, though many do have recourse to their mothers when they are in trouble, the majority of single mothers do not have recourse to anyone.

Single motherhood exists in all socio-economic strata although it is more common in the lower and higher extremes. In the lower extreme, single mothers who have remained unmarried predominate, whereas in the upper classes, they tend to have left or been abandoned by their husbands (Cenzontle, 1989). This could indicate that women with more resources have developed a greater consciousness of their subordination in addition to possessing greater possibilities for sustaining their families, enabling them to opt for divorce or a more independent conjugal position. Meanwhile, the less formal attitude about marital relations among poorer urban and rural women could have resulted from the continuity of the colonial cultural patterns analyzed

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[24] In 25 percent of all family units there are two mothers with children and in 12 percent there are three or more of them. This implies that at least 37 percent of Nicaraguan families are extended, i.e., have more than one family nucleus (Cenzontle, 1989).

earlier (great sexual liberty which functioned to increase the number of tribute payers, reproductive norms charged with violence, and so on) as well as from the labor force mobility required during harvest seasons.

In middle sectors, there is a higher incidence of co-habitation, which may owe to the influence of the Catholic Church's ideology in the urban areas where the middle classes are predominately concentrated. Similarly, the fact that co-habitation has a surface appearance of stability may also result from the Church's influence which would contribute to a resignation to self-sacrifice. As a result, the greater family "stability" in the middle sectors conveyed by the lower incidence of single motherhood indicates a higher level of acceptance among the women of paternal irresponsibility, abuse and violence in exchange for the "security" which they somehow sense from living within the family "ideal" and receiving a certain amount of economic support.

Three groups of single mothers can be distinguished in Nicaragua (Olivera, de Montis, Meassick, 1990). The first group (31 percent) includes young women, most under 25 years of age, who have one or two children and live in their parents' or mother's home. These women are treated as daughters of the family. The father, the older brother, or the mother is the one who grants them permission for excursions, visits, studies, etc. and although many of these women work, they continue to be financially dependent on

their families. Very few receive help from their sporadic, non-live-in partners. The highest percentage of single mothers who study (65 percent) are found in this group, although actually very few are able to continue their studies since they are responsible for their children and for helping out in the house.

A more numerous second category (40 percent) is composed mostly of women between 26 and 35 years of age who have had an average of two live-in partners and three children. Most are merchants but workers and domestic employees also figure prominently in this group. A significant number live in extended families but most live in their own family units. In the latter case, despite the fact that the man does not live with them, he is recognized to be the head of the household and the breadwinner although he is probably a new partner, as the majority of these women have entered a second relationship. Many of them work and take care of the home with the help of their mother or another woman to see to the children.

The third group of single mothers (29 percent) is composed mainly of women older than 35 years of age who live in independent family units, have been involved in two or three relationships and have an average of five children. They are the "bosses" and breadwinners of their families and many work in trade activities and in the service sector, although relevantly, women with professional and technical careers are concentrated in this group.

CHAPTER V

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE

A. The Integration of Women into the Labor Market

One characteristic of dependent economies is the exploitation of workers, as the generation of capital is based fundamentally on the overutilization of the labor force. This feature, which stands out in agro-export countries like Nicaragua, permanently combines the original accumulation with other forms of precapitalist and capitalist forms of exploitation inherent in the international arena. What is more, the use value that women's domestic work produces remains unrecognized. Women not only engage in subsistence and market production through family craft and wage labor but also are responsible for the production and reproduction of the labor force thereby benefitting the family unit directly, which is a qualitative and quantitative requirement of the system.

Unpaid household labor amounts to a permanent subsidy to the owners of the means of production. It constitutes one of the most important axes for the economic functioning of capitalist society and for the subordination of women connected to their roles as mothers and wives. The women's familial roles make them the objective and ideological institutional bases for the reproduction of the captialist, patriarchal system wherein the various elements of their subordination (sex-affection-work) interrelate in a specific

manner according to the social class and cultural system of each social formation (Ferguson, 1989).

The great majority of Nicaraguan women, regardless of the social class or ethnic group to which they belong, engage in household labor. Their workday extends for an average of sixteen hours, seven of which are dedicated to the domestic tasks which are not recognized as work even by the women themselves. What is more, some of the housewives who say they do not work are actually involved in one way or another in informal labor, preparing and selling food -- specifically tortillas and sweets -- needlework or other types of typically "feminine" activities in order to survive. The alienating conviction that their work does not constitute work is one of the ways in which women themselves express the profound devaluation they experience as human beings belonging to and existing for others; at the same time, it facilitates the broader systemic exploitation and thereby the biological and social reproduction of that system.

Fifty-two percent of the population of Nicaragua is female. More than half of the female population live in urban zones, while 47 percent live in rural areas. In both milieus very important structural factors are at play. First of all, there are more women than men of working age (older than 10 years). This means that women possess a considerable economic and political potential with regard to their possible integration into the work force. Secondly,

there are 3.45 poor women to every man considered equally poor according to the UN classification (INEC, 1985). This is clearly a case of the feminization of poverty. More than half of all women work away from the house, indicating a very high rate of labor force participation in comparison with other Latin American countries. However, though it might to some extent relieve them from their economic dependency on men, their integration into the labor market, far from resolving their subordination, adds to their exhaustion without alleviating the extreme poverty in which the majority live.

Women have been incorporated into paid labor not as a result of economic and social development, but on the contrary, out of the urgent need to ensure their own and their children's survival. It is a duty which is assumed to be exclusively theirs, associated with their reproductive function. They undertake the economic obligation of subsistence as a facet of their domestic fate, which, though strengthening the legitimacy of their authority in the home, increases their objective and ideological subordination by reinforcing their identity of servitude. The monopolygamous families typical in the country would not be able to exist if women did not earn a certain amount of income, since men are incapable of supporting the two or three family nuclei -- of between ten and fifteen people -- they tend to have. This situation has emerged from a Nicaraguan cultural history which created a space for women to work outside of

the home. The pre-hispanic epoch's tributes were in large part paid by women's non-household labor; similarly, in Colonial times, women worked in weaving houses or in haciendas outside of their own homes.

One important trend in the national economy during the eighties was the feminization of the work force. Women's labor force participation almost doubled between 1971 and 1983; in 1983 alone, 32 percent of the working-age women (older than 10 years of age) joined the formal wage-labor workforce. Although these percentages seemed to have decreased toward 1985, the subsequent trend that decade was actually one of growth (SPP-ESDENIC, 1989). It is difficult to tell to what extent this trend will be maintained within the new national context and global capitalist development; the economic crisis continues to affect mainly women within the popular sectors, as they are the first to lose their jobs.

The majority of women who work for an income dedicate themselves to trade activities. Office workers, teachers and nurses form the second most common occupation group, followed by artisans, predominantly women who sew in their homes, many of whom get paid by piecework.[1] Female factory workers and farm laborers are a minority. Nevertheless, a

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[1] Of all women older than 16 years of age, 37.5 percent work for income excluding housewives who also work outside the home: 28 percent in trade activities, 19 percent as office workers, teachers and nurses, 18 percent as artisans, and 5 percent as industrial workers and farm laborers (Cenzontle, 1989).

great number of female peasants and industrial workers complement their income by engaging in trade activities, as do even the majority of female professionals.[2]

As of the 1983 crisis the informal working sector grew significantly. Between 1980 and 1984 the percentage increase went from 28 to 40 percent and was crucial for the growth of the EPA (Economically Active Population) for while the nonagricultural formal sector grew by 6 percent, the labor force in the informal sector increased by 66 percent (Fitzgerald, 1987).

In this sector, as in the others, gender is one of the factors that determines specific activities. As suggested above, women perform typically "feminine" tasks such as domestic work, the preparation and sale of food, needlework, etc. thereby reproducing the sexual division of labor. Engaged in informal trade or doing piecework in their homes, they preserve the ideology of the housewife, because the nature of their economic insertion in the public sphere is nearly indistinguishable from domestic work. Childrearing and housework, together with low educational attainment, are elements which limit their options for working in sectors other than the informal one. They are the ones who take the jobs with the least pay, lowest status and dimmest future,

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[2] Sixty percent of all laborers, 40 percent of all industrial workers, and 67 percent of all professionals engage in trade activities or handicrafts. In turn, 27 percent of all female merchants consider their professions as technicians, teachers, secretaries or nurses to be of secondary importance (Cenzontle, 1989).

encountering strong resistance as they attempt to transgress the boundaries of the private realm to which they have been assigned. The recent experience of a group of female bricklayers in Condega illustrates the difficulty women have had in being accepted into "typically male" occupations. In Condega, after various conflicts, mockery and contract cancellations were common from people who "they do not trust us because we are women," the group had to disperse "each on her own, working temporarily in whatever comes up, but always in the hope that people will contract us and trust us," ("Las albañilas de Condega," 1990: 18).

The greater integration of women into the different dimensions of the labor market during the past decade, which involved leaving the home and thus trespassing in a typically masculine space, has been attributed to various factors: women's consciousness of the need for involvement in revolutionary tasks; the decrease in fertility among middle and upper sectors; some improvements in their work conditions specifically in agro-export industries; and an increase in the number of single mothers who generally find that they need to work in order to provide for their children. However, the fundamental impetus behind women's integration emerged from the economic crisis, the war and the emigration of men. These tensions caused a discernible deterioration in family income and considerably reduced the available male labor force, thus forcing women to integrate into public sphere production. Paradoxically, the country's

critical and bellicose economic situation fueled social processes that tended to undermine and fundamentally challenge the structures of subordination and machista values and behavior that permeate the lives of Nicaraguans.

In terms of income women also suffer discrimination. The majority of the positions they occupy are those with the least authority, the least specialization and consequently the lowest salaries. Reproducing their traditional role of servitude and home administration, women occupy 53 percent of all administrative positions and 56.49 percent of the general maintenance services while only 15.7 percent of all director and civil servant positions (Olivera, de Montis, Meassick, 1990).

Between 1980 and 1987 real wage deterioration reached 94 percent, while consumer prices rose by more than thirty thousand percent. This tendency, far from disappearing, has exacerbated under the new regime which has eliminated all food, health and education subsidies for workers. This has made family unit reproduction increasingly difficult and families find themselves forced to undertake a survival strategy combining fixed incomes with those obtained in microbusinesses or through crafts sales. In this context, mothers play a very important economic role within the family unit, particularly in monopolygamous families. Within them they promote economic solidarity, the pooling of incomes and consumption among the members, strengthening the extended family pattern because of the need to join several

salaries in order to survive. This economic role entrenches their authority within the nuclear family. Also, since their incorporation into the labor market is so massive, particularly during periods of crisis, they become an added buffer for economic crises, working double and triple shifts.[3]

In Nicaragua 45 percent of all women work one daily shift. The majority of those engaged in housework, half of whom cannot read, are young, live with a partner, have one or two children, and regard their man as the head of the household. Among this group's distinctive characteristics is the conception that men have the right to beat women; a second common trait is a strong adherence to religious organizations which reinforces women's role as the "obedient servant" to others through religious ideologies, myths and beliefs. The majority are wives or daughters of farmers who usually help their husbands with their chores without considering it to be work. Only an infinite minority (4 percent), most of whom are single and childless, complete a daily shift as students or by working away from the house mainly as merchants, office workers, teachers, or nurses (Cenzontle, 1989).

The majority of Nicaraguan women (52 percent) older than 16 years of age carry out two daily shifts amounting to

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[3] Every "shift" refers to an economic activity performed, be it domestic labor (which includes both childcare and housework), studies, or wage labor. The "total workday" refers to the sum of these.

an average of 16 hours of work. A large portion of them are family heads or share the control of the house with their husband or partner and a majority of them have three or more children. It is interesting to note that the frequency with which women work two shifts increases in proportion to the number of children that they have. This could suggest that the fundamental motive behind their participation in the labor market is the resolution of the family's economic problems. Among the women who combine two shifts are also those who are most enlightened about their gender subordination and who question the male dominion over them in their jobs as well as in their families.

The main economic activity in which the women in the double shift work group are engaged lies in the commercial sector: they have small, neighborhood stores, sell food or conduct some other informal activity in their own houses. Nevertheless, the group also includes students who do wage labor in addition to attending school, the majority of professional women with higher education and maids "con dormida adentro."[4]

Maids in a way epitomize the Nicaraguan female's position of great patriarchal subordination, living profoundly alienated as women and as workers. The majority of them are single mothers who live and work away from their

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[4] Expression referring to the requirement for maids to reside in the houses where they are employed, thus increasing their isolation.

homes in exchange for a wage which is generally quite low; frequently, the maids often also serve as concubines for the manand the sons in the house. The majority of these employed women cannot read or write, which reduces them to a form of slavery which is nonetheless essential for the indispensable income that it generates.

Some Nicaraguan women even carry out three daily shifts. Among them 60 percent are poor or very poor. They do the housework, hold a job and also study or participate in some political organization or church where they are assigned a countless number of tasks that neither they nor anyone else consider to be work. Moreover, only a third of the women who carry out two or three daily shifts consider their wage labor to be more important than their domestic labor (Cenzontle, 1989). Table 1 on the following page indicates the percentage of Nicaraguan women by their principal occupation and their number of daily work shifts.

The higher a woman's educational attainment, the more comprehensive her ability to work. Those who have completed secondary education, technical training or higher education increase their number of shifts proportionally. This means that as long as the gendered division of labor remains unchanged within families, education tends to add to the work burden on women. It also grants them access to greater resources and better paid jobs which allow them more financial independence from their husbands. Both phenomena reflect the profound complexities inherent in the

deconstruction of women's various subordinated positions, for the resolution of the inequities of one of these deepens

Table 1

Percentage of Nicaraguan Women by Principal Occupation and Number of Daily Work Shifts [5]

	I	II	III
Home	91	32	0
Farm	0	3	15
Industrial factories	0	6	12
Commerce	3	24	8
Professional	1	4	4
Masons	1	13	12
Office workers, teachers, and nurses	2	10	35
Domestic workers	2	6	12
Students	0	1	0
Other	0	1	2
TOTAL	100	100	100

and conceals those of another. Along these lines, it is also interesting to note that more than a third of those who have attained higher education qualifications live alone or

[5] (Cenzontle, 1989: 65).

are single mothers, thereby augmenting their responsibilities and solitude.

There is a significant difference between the lifestyle and ideology of the housewife and those of the working woman. Many of the women who are integrated into the labor market, in addition to having received a higher level of instruction, have fewer children and possess a higher degree of gender consciousness. The majority of them believe that men should also be responsible for raising their children, cooking and cleaning, and that women should not necessarily obey their husbands, contrary to the profound hegemonic norms and ideologies to which they are constantly exposed in the numerous societal institutions (Cenzontle, 1989). Logically, they dedicate less time to household tasks and their children, and have less leisure time during the day. When they do find free narrow spaces of time, they generally spend them watching soap operas, the messages of which practically always reinforce their subordinated identities, thereby generating strong feelings of guilt and insecurity about their transgressions.[6]

B. Women's Organized Participation in Public Life

The Sandinista Revolution sought to construct popular power according to a transformative concept of democracy

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[6] Women who work outside of their homes spend a daily average of less than three hours on domestic tasks and childcare and one hour on leisure (Cenzontle, 1989).

national class-based analysis of domination, and by the patriarchal, authoritarian, "assistentialist" and discriminatory exercise of power.[7] Lacking was a comprehensive vision which contemplated the strategic importance of analyzing and overcoming the interwoven, mutually reinforcing relations of domination which exist within Nicaraguan society. In this context, the lack of a strategic perspective on gender meant that women's subordination was seen as one of the "problems" to be resolved so that women could participate in the various tasks of the revolution, rather than as an indicator pointing at a larger structural problem of patriarchy that demanded transformation. For example, little consideration was given to the fact that, under the existing sexual division of labor, demanding women's participation in the militias, health services, and other communal activities meant imposing double and triple work days upon them.

Without a doubt, the spaces opened for women's popular participation during the period of Sandinista government, despite certain limitations, are without historical precedent in Central America. In the midst of the U.S. government's constant aggression, which blocked national aspirations and the desire for sovereignty, popular organizations managed to develop and to mobilize social sectors historically deprived of power, establishing

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[7] "Assistentialist," again, refers to a dependence-creating mechanism.

was given to the fact that, under the existing sexual division of labor, demanding women's participation in the militias, health services, and other communal activities meant imposing double and triple work days upon them.

Without a doubt, the spaces opened for women's popular participation during the period of Sandinista government, despite certain limitations, are without historical precedent in Central America. In the midst of the U.S. government's constant aggression, which blocked national aspirations and the desire for sovereignty, popular organizations managed to develop and to mobilize social sectors historically deprived of power, establishing themselves as defenders and executors of the revolutionary process. However, women's organizational participation and ability to transform into political subjects was severely limited by the failure to acknowledge the specificity of the Nicaraguan woman's situation.

Women participated on a massive scale in the various mobilizations that were launched during the decade. However, contrary to the commonly held image of the women's movement, only 14.6 percent of all women over 16 years old currently are active members of organizations.[8] Only seven

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[8] Clara Murguialday's optimistic words echo that commonly held belief: "...[A]fter the debates of 1986 there was no turning back. The unnamed problems of women emerged from hiding to receive firsthand attention in the newspapers, in parliamentary sessions, in AMNLAE's claims' platforms, in the meetings of the Sandinista leadership, in the streets, shops, buses and dormitories. Since then no corner of daily life nor any public space escaped the

percent of them are members of popular organizations promoted during the revolution (Cenzontle, 1989), and the rest, mainly housewives, belong to religious groups in which 60 percent of the members are female (Pérez, Vega, Aguirre, 1988). (Table 2 indicates the percentage distribution of organized women among various organizations.) Furthermore, it is surprising and worrying to note that a great number of unorganized women formerly did belong to an organization and that their withdrawal coincided with the rise of imperialist aggression as of 1984 (Iztani-UCA, 1988).[9]

Table 2

Percentage Distribution of Organized Women [10]

Organization [11]	**Percent**
AMNLAE	12
FSLN	8
JS19J	13
ANDEN	20
FETSALUD	2
CST	2
RELIGIOUS	43
Total	**100%**

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effects of the 'feminist explosion'" (Murguialday, 1990: 201).

[9] In a survey which Cenzontle conducted in 1989 of the 85 percent of all women who are unorganized, one fourth of the 85 percent stated that they used to belong to an organization. Today, it is very probable that this statistic has increased in the face of the political and economic crisis experienced by the country under the new neo-liberal government.

[10] (Cenzontle, 1989: 49).

[11] AMNLAE: Luisa Amanda Espinoza Women's Association; FSLN: Sandinista National Liberation Front; JS19J: July 19th Sandinista Youth; ANDEN: National Association of Nicaraguan Educators; FETSALUD: Federation of Health Workers; CST: Sandinista Workers' Union.

Organized women generally exhibit the following characteristics. The majority live in urban areas and work away from the home, meaning a triple work day for many; a minority are therefore solely housewives or students.[12] The majority also belong to the generation of young people who participated in the revolutionary war to overthrow the Somoza dictatorship. There are high percentages of illiteracy among women peasants and agricultural workers and there is a low level of educational attainment among female industrial workers and generally a medium level of instruction in FETSALUD and ANDEN. In all the organizations, the problem of childcare is urgent. Sex education and family planning programs are implemented only in rare instances (like in the case of the ATC), while in the Educators' Association these topics are ironically tabooed. The income levels in all sectors are very low and the weakening of wages' buying power over the past few years has caused a high rate of turnover especially in the service sector.

This situation invites several observations. First, the myth of a massive organized participation of women during the Sandinista regime needs to be dispelled. One cannot

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[12] Of the 14 percent of organized women, 68 percent work outside the home, 18 percent are housewives, and 11 percent are students. Thirty-eight percent are between 26 and 35 years old, 31 percent are between 16 and 25 years, and 30 percent are over 35. Seventy-six percent live in urban areas while 24 percent live in rural areas (Cenzontle, 1989).

confuse women's incorporation into economic activities and production with an interest in political participation. As has been noted earlier, the "feminization" of the work force was related fundamentally to the need to complement family income and the transfer of the male labor force toward the war effort. Nor can simple mobilizations around specific issues, which are sometimes of a very circumstantial nature, be confused with a more conscious political will and participation in decision-making aiming to transform the status quo of power relations. Specifically, it does not approach a militant participation and belligerent social practice in struggling for their particular claims as women immersed in the various microcosms that comprise the Nicaraguan experience. Furthermore, the fact that a large number of organized women work outside the home perhaps is due to the strong institutional and political link that existed under the Sandinista government between the labor market -- above all the state enterprises -- and the popular organizations, principally in the case of female agricultural and industrial workers and women who work two or three daily shifts.

The objective and subjective elements of subordination play a determining role in the organizational participation of women. Along those lines, it is logical to think that the social and political consciousness of women who work and are organized is much more developed than that of the remaining great majority who are confined to the home. However, a

great portion of them have such contradictory understandings of women's roles that it is difficult to believe that there might exist a comprehensive development of their gender consciousness "in themselves" and "for themselves" which would allow them to struggle forcefully against their subordination.[13]

There is a wide gap between the discourse and practice of organizational activity. Many working women state that they have not joined an organization because they have no time, because it is not meant for women, because they believe it will not solve anything, because they are not interested or because their husbands would not allow them to become involved.[14] Meanwhile, the great majority (85 percent) of women hold that it is important to participate in organizations and almost half also think they would like to occupy an administrative position. The reasons for which they argue their opinion are surprising: (61 percent) "for equality," "for freedom," and "to take advantage of the spaces that the revolution has granted us" versus a small

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[13] Based on the conceptualization of Antonio Gramsci, referring to the proletariat, consciousness "in themselves" refers, in this case, to women's achievement of consciousness of their subordinated condition, while consciousness "for themselves" refers to women's awareness of the need to act collectively for their transformation (Gramsci, 1957).

[14] Thirty-four percent state they have not joined an organization for lack of time, 31 percent because they think it is not meant for women or doesn't solve anything, 25 percent for lack of interest and 10 percent because their husbands will not allow them (Cenzontle, 1989).

minority (13 percent) who would like to organize in order to resolve some immediate problem or need. Most of the answers clearly correspond to slogans that were widely disseminated and publicized during the period of Sandinista rule and contrast markedly with the day-to-day reality lived by the most of the women. Despite the quotes above, the majority are not organized, are housewives, and feel that women should obey their husbands and that there should not be sexual equality between men and women (Cenzontle, 1989). Even if some elements of propaganda such as the slogans sparked some political awareness in a broad cross-section of women, they are not enough in themselves to sway the subjective elements necessary for developing transformative political consciousness. Furthermore, it is ironic that though they employed the slogan-based answers, many women had negative experiences with organizational participation which led to their withdrawal and therefore a decrease in their revolutionary potential.

1. Revolutionary Organizations in which Women Participate

A majority of Nicaraguan women are affiliated with religious organizations.[15] However, belonging to a

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[15] Churches have played an important role in the country before and after 1979. The focus of each has depended mainly on the interests of the priest or pastor in charge. The Catholic Church divided into "comunidades de base" ("grassroots communities") openly associated with the Sandinista Front, and a traditional branch holding a more reactionary position. Meanwhile, the Evangelist churches have been quite consistent in experiencing greater tension

religious organization generally reinforces traditionalism and deeply held beliefs that create inequities for women, placing limits on the development of a consciousness that would aim to break their chains.

The spaces in which the greatest guidance and mobilization of women as dynamic forces for the revolution have occurred, have been the popular organizations promoted by the FSLN during its administration. Women have participated actively in the various occupational and union organizations which bring together male and female industrial workers (CST), health workers (FETSALUD), teachers (ANDEN), professionals (CONAPRO Héroes y Mártires), agricultural workers (ATC) and peasants (UNAG). These organizations, which group the different sectors involved in production and services, aim to defend the interests and labor rights of their membership, encouraging their participation in looking for resolutions for specific sectoral problems.

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with the revolutionary process. For some time there have existed women's movements within the churches. For example, Feminine Societies within the Baptist Church have organized women for the past 50 years for the purpose of theological instruction and interpretation of the Bible; the Programa Pastoral de la Mujer which emerged at the beginning of the 1980s within the CEPAD (Comité Evangélico Pro Ayuda al Desarrollo) and which mainly promotes health training, theology, productive projects, and so on; the Movimiento de Mujeres Evangélicas de Nicaragua created recently within the CIEETS (Centro Intereclecial de Estudios Teológicos y Social) focusing on activities of literacy, theology, productive projects, etc.; and the Movimiento Ecuménico de Mujeres sponsored by the Centro Ecuménico Antonio Valdivieso (CAV) which also promotes theological reflection and supports productive projects (Brenes et al., 1991).

Geographically, the population has been divided into neighborhood groups through the Community Movement (the Sandinista Defense Committees of the first years of the revolution). The Committees had a very active participation in defense of the revolution during the early period of Sandinista rule. Together with other organizations they launched parastatal projects such as education and public health brigades, defense and vigilance task forces, price controls, and the distribution of basic foodstuffs in addition to their own political activities of propaganda and agitation around the revolutionary project. They were constrained, however, by a sectarian partisan focus which weakened them, compelling them to reconstitute themselves under a broader and more pluralist focus of participation. They were in the midst of that discussion when the FSLN lost the elections.

Younger people, who tend to be more united with the FSLN as they have had more political than occupational objectives, have participated in the July 19th Sandinista Youth (JS19J). Meanwhile, women have been present in all these groups and in others more specifically geared towards women, the most relevant of which, in terms of national scope, has been the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Women's Association (AMNLAE) which currently is struggling to achieve a broader vision closer to a feminism that considers the strategic interests of gender.

The main objective of all these organizations has been to support the revolutionary process by urging popular participation in national public political life at the grassroots level as well as in their representation before State institutions. Within this framework, their common programmatic points have revolved around defense, production, food provision and support for health and education services. At the same time, their particular demands have primarily included the improvement of education and political schooling, their members' participation in administration, and technical financial training. After the creation of Women's Secretariats within each of these groups, various petitions with specific women's demands have gradually emerged.

By their origins and their objectives all of the popular organizations mentioned above have constituted the "fundamental forces" of the revolution. Their militancy, consolidation and autonomy have been put to test ever since the FSLN lost its hegemonic power in the government. They bear the responsibility for guiding the people in their confrontations with the new neoliberal government and with other union and occupational organizations that emerged after April 1990 under the wing of the new government.

The macho work methods of the aforementioned organizations, all of them mixed with the exception of AMNLAE, and the low level of integration and numerical participation of women, bear evidence of women's

subordination. The highest proportions of organized women are found in the community movement and the service sectors -- health, education, textiles, clothing and food industries -- all of which extend their domestic roles. Their participation is significantly lower in the production sectors, directly reflecting their unequal insertion in production, which is particularly evident in the case of female peasants and agricultural workers, for many of them constitute a work force reserve, working only temporarily.[16]

Only 17 percent of all organized women occupy director's positions (Cenzontle, 1990c). This number of course matches the low proportion of female members. However, even in organizations in which the great majority

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[16] Only 12 percent of the membership of the Agricultural Workers' Union (UNAG) is female; 40 percent of the Farm Workers (ATC) and the Sandinista Workers' Union (CST); 80 percent of the Health Workers' Federation (FETSALUD); and 70 percent of the National Association of Nicaraguan Educators (ANDEN). These statistics have undoubtedly undergone great modifications under the structural adjustment imposed by the current government which is leading to the unemployment of large numbers of women in wage labor. Meanwhile, the Nicaraguan Confederation of Professionals (CONAPRO) has a membership which is 40 percent female; the Nicaraguan Journalists' Union (UPN) 50 percent; and the Sandinista Youth (JS) in 1984 was 46 percent female with 40 percent women directors (CIERA, 1984a). In the community movement 60 percent of the members are women. In 1985 people spoke of 15,000 Sandinista Committes of Defense per block, with 600,000 affiliates and 300,000 people involved in vigilance task forces (CIERA, 1984a). The number of affiliates decreased greatly during the following years, but there was still said to be a high percentage of women (56.5 percent) participating in them (Redondo and Juárez, 1986; Encuentro Nacional de Fuerzas Fundamentales, 1989).

of the members are women, such as FETSALUD, the directors at the national level are almost all male. The extremely low incidence of women directors, as well as their low organizational participation in general, reflect the prevalence of a discriminatory gender ideology that reproduces the traditional roles of submission and dependence into which men and women are socialized. What is more, the great majority of the women who do come to occupy executive positions assume the style and behavior of men, as we shall see later on.

Very few women are grassroots leaders of the UNAG, and though in the ATC and the CST their participation is significantly higher, it is consistently lower relative to male directors.[17] As for FETSALUD, the great majority of their grassroots leaders are women, while in ANDEN they constitute only 30 percent.[18]

The lower number of women affiliates and directors in almost all the organizations confirms the significant disparity that exists between their participation and that

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[17] Women comprise 7 percent of the grassroots leaders in the UNAG and between 35 and 40 percent of them in the ATC and the CST. In the 1989 conference of the Fundamental Forces people spoke of a 40 percent rate of female affiliation with the ATC, that is 10,500 women, of whom 485 (35 percent) were in administrative positions. Five years earlier there had only been 15 percent, and this improvement undoubtedly owed to the specific work of the Women's Secretariat as of 1984-5.

[18] In FETSALUD 90 percent of the grassroots leaders, 95 percent of the permanent health promoters, 75 percent of the trainers, and 70 percent of the occasional health promoters in the Health Task Forces are women (Pérez, 1988).

of men. This even more evident when we analyze the disproportionately low numbers of women at the regional and national levels of administration above all in the production sectors. The disparity has to do with the different problems derived from their oppressed condition, as has been noted, and also from the prevailing sexist ideology which devalues their work ability. Women work double and triple shifts, have lower rates of educational attainment and are segregated from specialized activities and directorship positions, which is clearly contradictory considering the recognition they have earned for their achievement, stability and responsibility as workers.

The proportion of women decreases the higher up one goes on the organizational ladder until the highest echelons where they are generally absent. What is more, in cases where they have reached those levels, "...we almost always occupy secondary roles, as secretaries of education and propaganda, social affairs, etc. where our presence is not indispensable for decision-making..." (Taller Cenzontle, 1990).

This low participation of women also owes to the frequent restructuring of the directive committees, the decay of union life, the authoritarian ways in which men centralize their decisions and direct the assemblies, and of course to the low interest in the promotion of women among the leaders, most of whom are men. Above all, though, it is due to the fact that women themselves lack the consciousness

to transgress their traditional roles more militantly. Nevertheless, the creation of women's' secretariats in the unions, the presence of some women in their administrations, and the consequent concern that is emerging around female workers' specific claims all tend to support the development of their class and gender consciousness. There is a gradual trend toward women's participation in the life of the popular organizations introducing a gender focus to the leadership, though it is not always received with the necessary attention.

The gradual development of a gender perspective in these organizations is apparent in the women's petitions, focusing mainly on immediate practical needs but also on their strategic gender interests.[19] With varying degrees

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[19] Maxine Molyneux's conceptualization of strategic and practical gender interests is very useful for this analysis: Strategic interests refer to those which emerge from an analysis of women's subordination to men, and vary according to the socio-political and cultural context in which they arise. They could include the total or partial abolition of the sexual division of labor; the reduction of the burden of domestic work and childrearing; the elimination of institutionalized forms of discrimination in the area of property rights or access to credit; the establishment of political equity between men and women; freedom of choice in reproduction; the adoption of adequate measures against male violence and control over women, etc. Practical interests refer to those which arise from the immediate and concrete conditions in which women live due to their gender position within the given sexual division of labor. They do not challenge the status quo of subordination although they derive directly from it. This is the case, for example, of the need for basic services, better housing and higher salaries (Molyneux, 1985). These conceptualizations of Molyneux, as well as Marcela Lagarde's distinction between the condition and situation of women (see footnote 10 of Chapter VI), are assumed as premises for this thesis, as opposed to some postmodernist,

of success, women have attained some solutions for all sorts of issues, ranging from legal aspects and the establishment of specific services for facilitating their work, to the implementation of state policies geared toward more urgent problems. Thus, women have made breakthroughs in the perception of their subordinated condition, aiming not only for material changes but also for a reformation of the attitudes and values among themselves and among men.

The specific demands of female workers mainly involve the elimination of wage differences and the reclassification of occupations. They are also struggling to attain a higher degree of access to education and technical-administrative and politico-ideological training, to avoid dismissals due to pregnancy, for a paid pre- and postnatal maternity leave, for sex education, and for certain social benefits for children such as childcare centers, rural infant services, health care, a broader distribution of the daily glass of milk for children, etc. In general terms it could be said that the unions have been concerned with the resolution of certain problems linked directly to the female workers' productivity. However, they have been rather limited in the resolution of problems related to the development of a consciousness dispelling the myth of the untouchability of the private sphere. Only in very rare instances have

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poststructuralist arguments which reject the notion of a universal strategic gender interest, lending primary importance to individual differences.

measures been taken against sexual harassment and battery, and though some women have gained access to traditionally male jobs, for example as tractor drivers, men still do not engage in "feminine" tasks, neither in production nor in domestic work.

In comparison to those of other mixed organizations, the claims of the female agricultural workers in the ATC have always been more militant from a gender perspective. This organization was the first to carry out a specific project geared towards the women of the sector. It conducted a study of their predicament and its origins, the results of which enabled them to devise a strategy for action with a broad grassroots participation. The study and perhaps these women's status as paid workers rapidly incorporated into production enabled them to organize at the grassroots level and allowed for their inclusion in the power structure of the union from the beginning. From there, they have managed to issue their demands more militantly. Furthermore, they have received echoes and responses also due to the fact that their strategy comprises working in alliances with male leaders at the various levels of the organization.

The peasantry constitutes the sector wherein women demonstrate the most serious backwardness given their objective conditions and the low level of development of their social and political consciousness. Their internalization of their subordination reaches a point where

they accept the violence and brutal discrimination imposed by male peasants without any resistance

> because that is how a woman's life has to be, that is why she is his woman, because a man is always worth more than a woman, because he works more, is stronger, is more intelligent, knows more, is more clever... because God made it that way, God himself is a man and the owner of everything, that is why he made man in his image. (Taller Cenzontle-UNAG, 1989)

In this sector, obviously, the accomplishments are still very few. Organized in the UNAG, women have had success mainly with immediate health and education problems. They have participated actively in cleaning shifts, infant vaccinations, and the Literacy Campaign and the Adult Education program of the Ministry of Education that considerably reduced illiteracy in the country. Their demands for access to credit and for the entitlement of lands in the name of both members of a couple or of the woman in her own right have been important as well. They have also struggled, with very little progress, for full membership in the cooperatives and for a fair valuation of family work.

2. The Long Struggle to Forge a Coordinated Women's Movement

Several structural and historical contradictions have impeded the formation of a strong, united and coordinated movement in Nicaragua capable of designing strategies for the sustained promotion of women's struggle for power.

These have limited the development of a movement with the capacity to advance processes of organization and consciousness-raising for women both personally and collectively "in themselves" and "for themselves" that would allow them to proceed with greater commitment in their struggle for emancipation.[20]

In this chapter I will focus on some of the challenges and problems that have arisen in the construction of a coordinated women's movement in Nicaragua. For that purpose, I will make use of the specific experience of the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Women's Association (AMNLAE) which, until February of 1990 when the FSLN lost the elections, defined itself as coordinator of the various women's organizations. Specifically, I will refer to certain contradictions related to its agenda and work methods which limited its coordination effort.[21]

a. Historical Antecedents

The history of the women's movement in Nicaragua extends back to the years before the triumph of the Sandinista revolution in July of 1979.[22] Some of its roots

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[20] Recall Gramsci's definitions; see footnote 13.

[21] There are several recent analyses of AMNLAE and other expressions of the women's movement in Nicaragua which give a more exhaustive account of the same. See the works of Ana Criquillion, Amalia Chamorro, Clara Murguialday, Ada Julia Brenes, Sylvia Saakes, Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, among others.

[22] The "women's movement" refers broadly to the different organizational expressions of women in the country. They include spaces in which women join together

can be found in the Women's Patriotic Alliance created in 1967 by the Socialist Party; in the incorporation of women's demands in the Historic Program of the FSLN; and in the creation of the Women's Association to Confront the National Problematic (AMPRONAC), founded in 1977 at the initiative of various militant women and cadres of the Sandinista Front. The churches' efforts to organize women also form part of that history. For example, the "Feminine Societies" promoted by the Baptist Church have been organizing women since the fifties for the purpose of promoting literacy, providing theological instruction and interpretation of the Bible, or simply for women to socialize with one another.

AMPRONAC was the first broad-based women's organization in the country. Female professionals, students, housewives, and merchants united to protest as mothers, wives, daughters or sisters. They joined together mainly to denounce the horrendous human rights violations committed during the Somoza dictatorship but also to claim recognition for some problems specific to women. They demanded equal pay for equal work and the elimination of prostitution, among other things, thus introducing a feminist perspective to women's organized struggles.

In September of 1979, with the Sandinistas' seizure of governmental power, the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Women's Association (AMNLAE) was founded, replacing AMPRONAC, and

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to struggle or obtain some type of benefit.

became the women's organization with the most extensive coverage in the country during the early years of Sandinista rule. The Association emerged due to the militancy of women themselves, who managed to integrate themselves into the popular movement and become an important social and political force during the insurrection and throughout the decade of Sandinista government despite the structural limitations of underdevelopment, war and the dominant patriarchal ideology.

There were few people in the country who were not aware of its history -- a history to which AMNLAE would refer in claiming a space of its own within the "recently conquered universe" of revolutionary power. Women in Nicaragua had participated actively in the war against the Somoza dictatorship, not only denouncing its atrocities and claiming their own rights as women, but also performing other tasks. They served as couriers and provided security houses, cared for the wounded, and cooked and washed clothing for the soldiers, thereby extending their domestic role, although many also joined the armed struggle and some even distinguished themselves as commanding officers.

From the onset, AMNLAE maintained that only through its political coordination would women succeed in changing their historically inferior status and gain an equal space in the new society. The slogan that the Association adopted during the early years, "Construyendo la Patria Nueva forjaremos a la Mujer Nueva" ("In constructing the New Country we will

forge the New Woman") accurately expressed its emphasis on women's insertion into the revolutionary process as a means for achieving changes in their social condition (Murguialday, 1990).

In contrast to most women's movements in other countries, AMNLAE was born as part of a popular revolutionary movement, gradually combining gender-based claims with national and class-based interests. It did not grow out of extreme and exclusive forms of feminism which promote struggles devoid of broader social content, and which in some cases advocate absurdly antagonistic confrontations between men and women, without the possibility of alliances.

The gains made during the period of Sandinista government were undeniably significant. As has been mentioned in other chapters of this work, women achieved legal and social rights struggling from their diverse organizational spaces and conducting various broad demonstrations. Some obtained employment opportunities traditionally reserved for men; preschools and childcare services were created; and important laws were enacted even though their actual implementation was faced with great adversity. In the majority of the cases, they were not enforced, whether because women themselves were not aware of their existence, or because the mechanisms needed to put them into practice were lacking. Examples of these were laws requiring all employers to pay equal pay for equal

work; the prohibition of the commercial use of women's bodies as sexual objects; agrarian reform legislation, unique in Latin America for recognizing women as legal subjects capable of holding land titles regardless of their marital status; and finally, the Law Regulating Family Relations and Law of Nurturing which require men to take responsibility for their children. Women even managed to introduce gender-based claims in revolutionary documents as important as the Women's Proclamation and the Constitution of the Republic in 1987.[23] Women who held leadership positions in the various FSLN political organizations, the majority of them from the middle and upper classes, played an important role in the latter achievement.

This social force composed of women was in some cases formally identified with AMNLAE and in other cases not. Through processes that were non-linear and changeable, sometimes activated from above and other times by women themselves at the grassroots level, women's groups autonomous from AMNLAE developed. Within some governmental and civil institutions, research teams were formed to study issues affecting women. Free legal assistance clinics were created to attend to women who came with all types of

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[23] On March 8, 1987, the FSLN publicly announced its Proclamation entitled "Women and the Sandinista Revolution." This identified AMNLAE as the official mechanism for organizing women with the fundamental objective of promoting women's incorporation into all the different revolutionary projects. The new Constitution, considered one of the most advanced in Latin America with regard to women's rights, was ratified the same year.

problems related to rape, domestic violence, divorce, child support payments, etc. Autonomous groups were also formed to promote health care, education, and productive projects locally, many of them financed by non-governmental organizations or international solidarity committees composed mainly of women.

Some of these groups were initially sympathetic towards AMNLAE although little by little they rejected its role as the central coordinating body. Many of them moved toward feminist perspectives as they sought to resolve strategic gender needs, though operating in a cultural context in which the concept of feminism still produced uneasiness and conflict. Among the contradictions that explain AMNLAE's loss of legitimacy as coordinator of the various women's groups are the following: its agenda and its work methods. Both themes figure in the current debates within the movement.

b. AMNLAE's Agenda

When the Sandinista Front came to power, it facilitated and promoted the expansion of popular organizations so that they could participate in the general tasks of the state and thus defend the revolutionary process and improve life conditions. At the same time, they struggled to resolve their specific demands as a group or social sector. The revolution opened political, economic, and social spaces to women so that they could struggle for the resolution of their specific claims as women to the extent possible in the

context of U.S. aggression, its economic boycott and a machista culture. However,

> the Sandinista Front very rarely managed to go beyond its homogeneous discourse regarding the entire pueblo as if the pueblo were not composed of individuals with distinct identities and interests. They privileged what the Sandinista leadership considered to be the general or overall interests of the country. The specific demands of different sectors or social groups, especially those of women and of the ethnic groups on the Atlantic Coast, were for a long time considered to be diversionist or, at best, secondary to the strategic interests of the Revolution. (Criquillion, 1992: 39)

It was argued that the objective conditions imposed by the national struggle against foreign military aggression, which called for a range of pragmatic solutions in the face of shifting and complex sets of circumstances, demanded immediate attention.

AMNLAE was built up by the FSLN and therefore depended on the directives of the party, just as all the other Sandinista mass organizations during the period of revolutionary government. Consequently, it mainly promoted the development of a national socio-political consciousness in women. Their gender problems of subordination and their need to struggle for emancipation were approached in a limited and timid manner, thus impeding a greater development of gender consciousness among them.

AMNLAE's specific demands focused fundamentally on the resolution of women's practical needs.[24] The Association

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[24] Recall Maxine Molyneux's conceptualization of strategic and practical gender interests; see footnote 19.

did not manage to articulate coherently the resolution of these practical needs with their strategic needs. Women were mainly mobilized to participate in health campaigns, neighborhood clean-ups, the collection of bottles needed in factories which did not have the currency to import them, the establishment of family gardens, and so on. The high priority task assigned by the FSLN as a consequence of the war to AMNLAE was to support the implementation of the Patriotic Military Service (SMP) by attending to the needs of combatants' mothers. The Association arranged for visits to the encampments, accessed news about their relatives, provided postal services, etc. As a result, AMNLAE was often seen as an organization of mothers of combatants, or "heroes and martyrs," an image which isolated it from many young women who did not identify with that role.

By not combining the resolution of these immediate needs with a process of consciousness-raising designed to deconstruct the existing system of gender-based values -- for example, by involving fathers and other family members of combatants, and not just mothers, in these activities -- the conditions were reinforced which later led many women to identify with and vote for Violeta de Chamorro. She, like them, was a "relatively unpoliticized [woman] as men understand politics," the widow of a "hero and martyr" assassinated by Somoza, an elderly woman dressed in white, the pure and good mother who would guarantee the children's

reconciliation and the return of "tranquility and peace in the Home" (Criquillion, 1992: 35).

In the context of the eighties -- with the contra war, economic blockade, and economic need for survival -- possibilities for introducing a deeper analysis of strategic gender needs were severely limited, and consequently, opportunities to coordinate a strong women's movement with a greater capacity for reflection and action to transform the patriarchal structures of society were also restricted. The ideological and political struggle unfolded only partially, with tabooed strategic themes brought very timidly into public debate and only at particular moments. Examples of these themes were sexual harassment, abortion, the repression of sexuality, shared childcare responsibilities, the sexual division of labor, domestic violence, and women's right to participate in the military. Moreover, by missing important opportunities, AMNLAE did not manage to shape a strategy for action which articulated the resolution of the practical needs felt by the majority of women with the strategic, emancipatory claims presented in certain declarations of the FSLN itself, such as the Women's Proclamation. This sharply limited women's ability to open up important new spaces of power. The fragmentation and dispersion observed in their agenda largely owed to the following reasons.

There was a lack of understanding in AMNLAE about the multiple forms of subordination which women experience, and

especially about the underlying cultural factors. The Association hardly recognized the heterogeneity of oppression in terms of sector, geography, age, religious creed, myths, forms of economic insertion, public and private spheres, etc. This limited the elaboration of cohesive strategies within the overall cultural, economic, political and social framework -- the definition of particular strategies derived from women's specificities yet encompassing the overall objectives of the revolution. If women had felt implicated in the struggle based on their own particular identities and circumstances, rather than feeling that they were in competition with one another, it might have been easier to achieve the cohesion and broad participation necessary to create a more effective women's movement.

The low degree of awareness was exacerbated by the failure to systematize the experience of women's groups, hampering theorization of that complex experience full of lessons and limitations. Missing was a debate and conceptual development of feminism, the concept of gender, the sexual division of labor and other topics that AMNLAE could have advanced, based precisely on that experience. These were themes surfacing in various women's spaces, mainly in groups which little by little defined themselves as feminist and were rejected by AMNLAE. The Association lent priority to pragmatism and activism over those reflections. They advocated the need to respond to

immediate tasks demanded by the war -- which did impose a rhythm of life in the country -- and argued that such ideas and categories were imported, brought to Nicaragua by foreigners thus generating confusion and diversionism among women. This resistance to systematization and theorization on behalf of AMNLAE was in turn reinforced by the predominance of oral culture in Nicaragua and by a certain generalized rejection of "intellectual work" by the great majority of the Sandinista leaders. Theoretical readings, abstractions, and the complexities inherent in reflective analysis were generally perceived as unnecessary. There was a need to act immediately and time could not be wasted on those kinds of "abstractions."

In addition, the lack of an agenda of struggle which aimed for the resolution not only of women's immediate needs but also of their strategic needs owed, to a great extent, to the fact that equality between men and women was not a fundamental axis in revolutionary postulates. Such inequity, which defines the patriarchal forms, was not considered a structural societal element to overcome. Despite its progressive position, the FSLN's Women's Proclamation did not holistically integrate the element of gender, with its many dimensions and implications, along with class-based and nationalist objectives. In the analysis of political, economic, and social reality, the gender category was not contemplated with the same importance as that of class, since orthodox Marxism

predominated in Sandinista thought. As in most parts of the world, discussions of politics and democracy in Nicaragua have been restricted to the public arena of individuals, while relations of domination within the private, untouchable realm of the home have remained hidden.

Two assumptions underlie these positions. First is the belief that the integration of women into the public realm will automatically lead to their emancipation. It is believed that gender inequality disappears to the extent that women are incorporated into production.[25] According to the erroneous evolutionist way of thinking which prevailed, the resolution of women's subordination was seen as something consequent and posterior to the elimination of other inequities. In other words, women's emancipation was foreseen as an evolutionary consequence of social and economic development, assuming that economic backwardness and class differences were at the root of oppressive relations between men and women. Among other limitations, the labor force was taken for granted and was not considered

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[25] For their part, the majority of the projects that were launched by various organizations under the Sandinista government reproduced household labor, reiterating the "domestic destiny" of women. For example, almost all of the productive projects that AMNLAE developed revolved around traditionally feminine activities such as sewing collectives, raising chickens and pigs, comiderias (eateries), beauty salons, etc. These were projects implying unrecognized double and triple workshifts, deepening the inequity between men and women. Moreover, the great majority of them failed economically, provoking a feeling of incompetence and weakness among women themselves and reaffirming their subordinated identities.

the product, in both quantity and form, of women's work by means of their subordination in that hidden private sphere.

A second assumption has been that the vanguard party and particularly its leaders, all men, are the "enlightened ones" who bear the truth and the responsibility to guide the oppressed masses in their struggle for liberation. As a result, from the pinnacle of party power, "orientations" from the FSLN were "lowered" to AMNLAE for its political action.

Even though the revolutionary political system significantly democratized some dimensions of public power, the notions and exercise of power which prevailed still attributed it mainly to members of the vanguard and to mass organizations serving as their "transmission belts" by implementing their orders.[26] The slogan "dirección nacional ordene" (national leadership commands), widely used during the Sandinista government, clearly reflected these viewpoints. According to this notion, the "vanguard" holds an integral knowledge of all the particular realities of the oppressed, a knowledge which is gradually disseminated among the "masses" so that they will actively participate in those tasks defined as priorities.

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[26] Regarding the political dimension within the public sphere, the following signs of democratization can be noted: the installation of a system of representation; the displacement of oligarchic groups; popular participation in tasks of the state; general armament of the people, etc. Regarding the economic dimension one might mention: agrarian reform, access to credit, and the formation of production cooperatives, among other things.

This conception and practice of power obviously negates the possibility of work methods based on a mutual learning between leaders and the rest of the population, and by ruling out processes that recognize the diversity of existing realities and types of knowledge, it prevents historically oppressed groups from developing the capacity to make their own decisions. In this manner, the political system reproduced the wide differences in access to power characteristic of capitalism and patriarchy, thus further obscuring the question of gender. It maintained elitist and authoritarian patterns of "power-over," imposing a hierarchical vision which justified manipulation and a lack of autonomy. This obstructed not only the development of human creativity in general, but also AMNLAE's ability to combine and coordinate the particular creativities of the various women's groups, some of which expressed other conceptions, new ideas, and more democratic and inclusionary organizational and work methods.

c. AMNLAE's Work Methods

Early in the Sandinista government, AMNLAE activists sought to integrate people into the various tasks that "came down" from the leadership -- such as the militias, clean-up brigades, etc. Meanwhile, AMNLAE's role was not entirely clear, causing tension with other organizations whose members were involved in the same tasks. As a result, the Association modified its organization and work methods so as to operate within the different popular organizations.

Thus, women's secretariats were gradually created within the Agricultural Workers' Association (ATC), the National Farmers' and Ranchers' Union (UNAG), the Nicaraguan Confederation of Professionals (CONAPRO), and so on. These internal bodies began to articulate women's interests with specificities of social class or occupation more concretely, and the resulting dynamism within the organizations enabled them to achieve certain results. The National Committee of AMNLAE was created, composed of representatives from these various groups along with AMNLAE's leadership, attempting to represent the different sectors and popular organizations. However, AMNLAE itself maintained its own national and regional structures headed by activists who were strongly rejected by the women who worked with other popular organizations. Immersed in power struggles and competition among themselves and against the majority male leadership of each organization, the female grassroots activists and leaders divided and exhausted themselves as they lost opportunities to develop the capacity to unite themselves and thus become a true force in their own right. As Milú Vargas has stated, "What happens when a woman is in charge? What are we women? Most of the time we are the first to disqualify her, to criticize her destructively. Envy, competitiveness and jealousy appear. Instead of approaching to support her, we are the first to isolate [her]" (Vargas, 1989a).

Each sector developed its own ways of implementing the "lines" of work drawn up by the FSLN, causing a great dispersion of efforts and reproducing within each organization the verticalism and centralization that characterized the FSLN's political functioning. Similarly, the women's groups that emerged and were strengthened throughout the period independent of party or government structures lost confidence in AMNLAE's mobilizational and coordinating capability. Many of these had initially maintained a rather close relationship with AMNLAE -- such as the Collective of Matagalpa, the Collective of Masaya, some of the Casas de las Mujeres (Women's Houses) in Managua, IXCHEN (a family planning clinic), and various NGOs.

AMNLAE thus lost credibility as the official expression of the women's movement -- credibility which could not be restored even by its final efforts, shortly before the defeat of the FSLN, to hold its own internal elections. Like the other popular organizations, it remained subordinated to the party that appointed its leadership. This vertical and sectoral mode of operation undoubtedly hindered the construction of a popular power which would allow for women's transformation from oppressed objects, dictated by the values of traditional Nicaraguan political culture, into social subjects with their own voices. The great majority of the women coordinated by AMNLAE remained subordinate to decisions made by men, with

only limited opportunities to influence these decisions and achieve positive solutions to their problems. Moreover, given women's enormous difficulties in identifying with each other and their lack of experience in exercising power, many women who obtained positions of power identified with men and ended up reproducing the vertical, authoritarian and competitive work methods of the patriarchal system.

As a result of these internal and external contradictions, during the past decade AMNLAE paradoxically became something of an elite without privileges. Separated from women at the grassroots by an ideology of integration with the Sandinista economic and political line, it could not turn into a uniting mechanism of the feminine social force in Nicaragua and much less into its power instrument, although it was, in many senses, a spearhead for the diffusion of some emancipating ideas among the popular sectors. Let us now examine what has happened to AMNLAE and the women's movement after the 1990 elections.

d. Current Coordination Efforts of the Movement and New Challenges

Having given birth twelve times, Paula Pérez, now eight months pregnant and determined not to have any more children, explained in a mixture of Miskito, Creole English and Spanish: "I wanted to know what was going to be said at this meeting. In Río Grande we don't know what goes on in other places, and nobody knows about the problems we have.

We are very poor and I've come to get help" ("Gente," 1992: 5).

Between the twenty-fourth and twenty-sixth of January, 1992, the "Encuentro of Nicaraguan Women for Unity in Diversity" took place in Managua.[27] About nine hundred women gathered from different parts of the country, social strata, political and ideological inclinations, ethnic groups, ages, occupations, and organizational experiences. During three days, they conversed about politics, sexuality, education, pleasure, violence, reproductive policies, the environment, the impact of structural adjustment measures being applied by the new government led by Violeta de Chamorro, and their struggles for livelihood and survival.

In the context of democratic spaces won by the Sandinista government and profound tensions and changes currently experienced across Nicaragua, this encuentro represented an important advance in the struggle to forge a strong, coordinated, and militant women's movement. It has helped reinterpret how society works and what it means to "do politics" within civil society, promoting new forms of consensus, mechanisms and styles of organization and leadership, that allow women's voices to be heard in

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[27] Although the best approximation of encuentro in English would be "conference," the word loses important connotations in translation. An encuentro is an encounter and a coming-together; it can also mean "a finding." In their chapter on "Feminisms in Latin America," Nancy Saporta Sternbach et al. emphasize the special meaning of this word (Escobar and Alvarez, eds., 1992).

government independently of political parties. The event was organized by a committee of women who came together voluntarily, without the sponsorship of any political party or social organization. Unlike most conferences held by AMNLAE or the FSLN, women did not have to participate as part of a delegation; any woman could attend in an individual capacity. By using a methodology based on questions tapping the women's own creativity and initiatives, rather than relying exclusively on documents or prepared position statements, a different work style was promoted. It encouraged self-affirmation and individual autonomy, and managed to break through the paralysis, conformism, and sense of victimization experienced by many women (Montenegro, 1986).

This meeting among women from diverse organizations was the culmination of the desire expressed by many to "revitalize" the movement after the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional lost national elections in February of 1990. Until then, as mentioned above, AMNLAE had constituted the central axis of the women's movement and defined itself as its leading organization.

As a forum led by and for women to defend their interests and expose their struggle for survival, the event put to test the viability of more democratic relations. It demonstrated possibilities for exercising power in new ways in which women participate as social subjects and agents of change -- in which women contribute to the construction of a

new social order by questioning the values, norms, everyday relations and subordinated identities that currently shape their lives in Nicaragua. Nevertheless, various problems emerged in the encuentro which constitute new challenges for women in their efforts toward coordination and empowerment.

AMNLAE decided not to participate in the event despite the efforts that were made to secure their presence. This deepened the first formal internal split that had been made on March 8, 1991, when the existence of multiple autonomous women's groups became publically evident.[28] Among the women who did attend the conference, there were different conceptions and definitions of feminism and different strategies for the construction of the movement (Criquillion, 1992). In addition, strong rivalries, complaints over impositions, and different interpretations of hegemonic intentions were expressed among the organizers, which impeded the possibility of a "new type" of coordination. Old and new conflicts arose between the organizers, limiting the possibilities for discussing precisely those conceptual differences and strategic visions. Such a discussion could have allowed women to move

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[28] On March 8, 1991, AMNLAE decided not to participate in the planning process of the Encuentro, which took almost a year to take shape. On that date AMNLAE also chose to organize its own assembly to celebrate March 8th (International Women's Day), instead of joining the many other autonomous organizations in the country which celebrated the occasion with a three-day festival entitled "The Festival of the 52 Percent," in an allusion to the percentage of the Nicaraguan population that is female.

toward a collective definition of an alternative system of broad-based coordination grounded on the experience of the and other events: autonomous of political parties, possibly rotating, and temporary, which could truly reflect the conference's theme, "unity in diversity."

The efforts following the Encuentro have had little impact. At the event, seven networks of activity were formed: Sexuality, Health, Education, Violence, Economy and Environment, Political Organization, and Communication. Each network was supposed to follow up on the proposals related to its particular theme. However, very few of these networks have been active. A strategy and coordination among the different groups does not exist, nor does the level of dynamism necessary to launch new comprehensive demands vis-á-vis the government and to protect the gains made during the past decade.

In the new national context of "structural adjustment," the challenges for women are enormous. They are the first to be fired from their jobs; the budget for social services of health and education is insignificant; child care centers are now almost non-existent; and the media constantly sends out messages which reinforce women's traditional roles of obedience to husbands and absolute responsibility for children. The National Assembly approved a new article for the Penal Code which sentences any person "who induces, promotes, advertises or practices copulation between two people of the same sex in a scandalous manner" to between

one and three years of prison. At the same time, the efforts to bring together and promote solidarity between the networks have been minimal. For example, the Sexuality Network issued a call for solidarity to protest in front of the government offices against the new article of the Penal Code but received a very feeble response and meagre attendance.

These circumstances underline the urgent need for women's groups to continue developing their micro experiences but also to discuss and rethink the possibility of forming a coordinating body for the movement capable of forging coalitions and alliances. A coordination capable of articulating particular strategies with comprehensive ones must be achieved in order to fight back more forcefully within the new national context, where many achievements of the past decade have already been lost and there is the clear danger of losing many more.

Nevertheless, in order to advance in these coordination efforts it is necessary to include new challenges. Women must analyze the lessons derived from their own experiences in the light of the "pending" theoretical themes -- what feminism is understood to be, the coordination of the movement, etc. -- but they must also reflect more in depth over the exercise of patriarchal power, what type of power women want, and the competitiveness and animosity that arise between them in their efforts to obtain it. The exclusion of a broader discussion of these "pending" themes during the

Encuentro within the workshops that were developed, despite the fact that participants showed interest in them, was the source of much frustration and conflict at the event. Paradoxically, just as there used to be a reluctance against debating strategic gender interests within AMNLAE's leadership and including more of them in the agenda, there was now resistance -- on behalf of precisely some of the same intellectual leaders who had been promoting those discussions within AMNLAE and were now organizers of the Encuentro -- against debating certain equally strategic issues within the movement at the Encuentro.

Drawing on earlier strategies, which promoted recognition of women's work and participation in the public sphere and began to demystify the private sphere by exposing it, women currently face the challenge of encouraging reflection also over even more intimate and personal spheres. Women must not only develop an empowering consciousness of the strategic issues mentioned above and their relationship to immediate survival needs; above all, and precisely in order to survive, they must also become aware of how their psychological identity is constructed in ways that prevent them from working together. They must understand and analyze their lack of self-esteem, insecurities, and rivalries in order to create a new sense of relationship and collectivity -- one of cooperation among women from different classes, ethnic backgrounds, and age groups who come together and truly recognize one other, so

that by living life in a truly liberating way, they can change the world (Lagarde, 1991).[29]

Only by continuing to deconstruct their subordinated identities, by overcoming the personal insecurities and fears which hinder the development of mutual trust and undermine the sense of sisterhood indispensable for working together -- only in this way will women manage to transform the patriarchal system that has pitted them as enemies. To the extent that this is done, women will be able to generate new coordination and work methods and become the unimaginable force needed to bring about profound transformations.

C. How Women Experience Positions of Power in the Public Sphere

The Sandinista Revolution significantly widened the possibilities for women to achieve positions of power in the government, the Sandinista party, unions, and the various popular organizations. The structural, cultural, political and ideological transformations that took place between 1979

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[29] Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde suggests that "sisterhood" or solidarity among women begins with an effort to deconstruct the culture, the society, the ideology of femininity that all women have internalized and which takes form in the friendship-enmity between women. Consequently, she argues that feminism can come only in the wake of a profound transformation of women themselves and of their relations with one another; because women are not only victims of oppression, but also, significantly, its most sophisticated agents/creatures whose vital task is the daily recreation of the patriarchal world.

and 1989 allowed a significant increase in women's participation in these spheres in comparison to the years of the Somoza dictatorship when their presence was almost non-existent. Women's participation in the different public power structures and popular mobilizations was a determining factor in the FSLN's 1987 declaration on women's subordination, and similarly, in the 1986 Constitution's inclusion of women's rights.

Nevertheless, these and other important changes favoring women during the ten years of Sandinista government should not be confused with the destruction of the patriarchal system of power. From their specificities, women entered these positions of power accepting the norms, myths and demands of patriarchy. To be "successful" they had to submit to the masculine system of domination. In doing so they experienced profound internal conflicts as they continually tried to reconcile the obligations in their public lives with their responsibilities in their homes. They assumed a typically male discourse, style, and behavior, thereby negating themselves and the possibility of coming together in public spaces to create a new way of exercising power and changing society.

They responded from their femininity to the masculine demands of the system, neglecting their own needs. By "completely giving up themselves" to "serve others" they met their assigned responsibilities with efficiency, discipline, and dedication. In those positions of leadership they

confronted high levels of competition especially among themselves because they had fewer opportunities than men. They found that competition was complicated by the inequitable demands placed on women because of their double and triple shifts in their family and professional lives. They experienced the brutal contradictions of having to act within the private sphere according to their conditioned feminine role -- thinking in a small, dispersed and emotional way -- while in the public sphere they had to adjust with great effort and personal exertion to the rational, masculine norms and logic of power. Nevertheless, this oppression compelled some women, in a dynamic of advances and retreats, to question their own identities as subordinated objects even though it did not lead to major changes in gender relations in their work place. It did lead these women to begin a process of challenging and changing their lives -- of questioning and redefining, of deconstructing their consciousness and political practices. I will illustrate some of the ways in which they lived those multiple contradictions in their intimate selves and in their public and private lives.[30]

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[30] The analysis presented is based mainly on public data on these women in the national media and fourteen interviews I conducted through Cenzontle in 1990.

1. Who were these Women Occupying Positions of Public Power?

The majority were mothers, relatively young, and few in number.[31] Women never represented more than 10 to 15 percent of the leadership positions, and a few years after the revolutionary triumph, a clear process of decline in their participation occurred. Most of them belonged to two generations of women from the middle or upper classes of Nicaraguan society -- women educated within the very strict norms and values characteristic of agro-export societies influenced by the high religiosity of Central America during the fifties. They were daughters of traditional families which had very clearly differentiated roles. Since their youth these women were educated to serve and take care of others, to be loyal, moral, pure and good housewives. The education they received included as a basic norm a severe repression of their sexual desires, bodies and affection, condemning their sexuality to a "naturally" passive role. Their bodies, desires and affections were viewed as having been conceived in sin -- a view arising from the predominant taboos, religious beliefs, and myths of the culture. As some of them recalled from their adolescent years:

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[31] Most of the women interviewed were younger than forty and ranged from thirty to fifty years of age. They belonged to a wide range of political positions: Sandinista, Liberal, Conservative, etc. Seven were married or in a couple relationship and seven were single. All of them had between one and five children, except one who didn't have any (Cenzontle, 1990c).

> I remember that when I was young I had to bathe with my clothes on because they said it was a sin of impurity not to do so. If I didn't the devil would poke me with his tail. Everything was a sin. I lived with a bunch of old women who were my aunts and lived surrounded by priests.
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> We were fifteen and sixteen and had boyfriends but didn't go farther than holding hands and giving each other light kisses out of respect, the purity of saving virginity until marriage. My boyfriend and I would go to the beach on weekends. The men would be on one side and the women on the others. The most we did was to go by the side of a rock and give each other light kisses. I had been taught what it was to be a good woman. She is supposed to be pure, a virgin, and the "others" were all scum -- the dirty, tainted women.

Menstruation, which comprises a significant biological and psychological event in women's lives, was forcefully devalued by their mothers and other women close to them. From early childhood this view resulted in serious insecurity, shame and fear regarding their bodies, pleasures and desires. One recalls her experience, similar to that of others:

> My mother, because she was a traditional person, never explained anything to me. I started menstruating quite young. I thought I had diarrhea because I could see my panties were getting dirty. I did not understand the phenomenon and had a lot of negative religiosity. My first steps in sexuality were brutal. When it rained I wore a raincoat in school all day because I didn't want my kotex and bra to show. It was horrible.

Internalized sexism originating from their suppressed sexuality has been a determining factor in the ways in which they relate to others. Nevertheless, some of them, as they grew older -- participating in sexuality workshops and confronting other experiences and readings -- succeeded in

overcoming certain sexual taboos and repressive beliefs and were able to develop a distinct appreciation of their bodies, emotions and desires. They began to break the chains holding them in their subordinated condition, though not without great emotional strain, guilt, and fear. As one recounts her experience of participating in a workshop:

> I went to a sexuality workshop and I left fascinated...they impressed me when they started to ask us how many of us knew our bodies and we began to talk about our sexuality. I began to like it, to feel less embarrassed and to reflect. In this way my process began. It started as if I was awakening from a dream...and then I woke up and began making decisions. I began to develop a new kind of relationship with my family...my working relationships with men and women started to change and deepened. My relationship with my superiors at different levels began to have a different content and shade. I started to feel and believe that I was a leader, a party militant and a militant of the women's movement.

The domestic imprisonment for which the majority of Nicaraguan women are educated was partially modified by this generation of women. The structural changes of the region, the expansion and modernization of capitalism, the formation of the Central American common market, and the recognition of women's civil rights widened women's social spaces. These young women from the upper and middle classes had access to an education in private schools (usually parochial) and universities, and some of them even had the opportunity to study abroad. They were able to confront new ideas and challenges, multiplying their possibilities for personal fulfilment and participation in the public, economic, and political life of the country.

In their own processes of construction and deconstruction of their identities they were particularly influenced by the political agitation that began against the Somoza dictatorship, as well as by the new humanist and liberal ideas dominating the universities and by fellow students studying Marxism. We should recall that by the end of the seventies, liberation theology had erupted with great fervor in Latin America, questioning the relations between faith, politics, and the problems of the poor and opening up a dialogue with the Marxists.[32] Many women were daughters or close relatives of politicians opposed to Somoza which possibly also influenced the development of their consciousness and practice.

The expansion of social spaces and opportunities to participate in public life during the late seventies presented a dilemma for these women. What were they to do -- follow the traditional domestic woman's role internalized during childhood, or the new opportunities in society to participate in the country's political and social struggles? They had the option of getting married and being "provided for" by their husbands unlike the great majority

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[32] "In 1968 the movement called liberation theology was launched as a result of the work of the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez and other like-minded collaborators. The first important impact of the group was felt at the annual meeting of the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) held in Medellín, Colombia. At this meeting the Latin American archbishops addressed significant social and political issues of the region. Special attention was given to the problems of the poor" (Schutte, 1993: 149-150).

of women from the popular classes who, because of their economic condition, were forced to leave their homes to look for employment. They could become wives of men of their same social and economic condition and reproduce, like most of their mothers had, the caring role of a housewife dedicating herself exclusively to her husband and children with the support of a maid. Nevertheless, the women refused to conform to this pattern of "domestic imprisonment," breaking with their historical legacy in several ways. As some of them remembered:

> I was married a virgin at eighteen to the ideal man according to my parents. He was rich, a good person and from a "good" family. I had my children with him and lived dedicated to them. I had maids but I liked to cook for them, take care of his friends, keep things in order and keep the house beautiful, until one day, I got fed up and started questioning the purpose of my existence in the face of the injustices that surrounded me.

> We started with the Christian movements, with friends. We began to join in the boom of the student movement and in that way we got involved in the take-overs of the schools and churches, thus gaining political consciousness.

The women interviewed incorporated themselves at a very young age into the so-called public sphere of life, the realm of the great societal events of economics and politics traditionally associated with men. As committed activists, they became important cadres of their parties and popular leaders during the period of insurrection. From 1979 they acted as ministers, vice-ministers, members of Congress, directors, and important leaders in government institutions, political parties, and popular organizations.

Unquestionably, between these generations of women and their predecessors there is not only a distance in age but also one in their political language, consciousness, and practice, in their gender models, ideals of participation, and hopes about democracy.

2. How did Women Achieve Power in Nicaragua?

In general, they were appointed by male authorities in conditions of great gender inequity. The appointments were given in recognition of their militancy with a few exceptions who said that they were elected democratically in their parties. We cannot overlook, as well, the cases in which women were recognized because they were wives or lovers of powerful men or made use of their sexuality and seduction.

There was a tendency to accept obedience to the masculine exercise of "power-over" others as logical and natural. As some of them expressed:

> They needed to put me some place. To find something for a qualified cadre. They sent me, and like a disciplined militant I went. I didn't have the least desire for that work at the beginning.

> In 1978 the first assembly of the association took place. It was clandestine. We were all appointed organizational tasks either directly, integrating ourselves to the guerilla contingents, or indirectly by supporting the guerrilla forces by taking care of the logistics: forming security houses, delivering mail, etc.

This submission to "power-over" was exacerbated and complicated by the long years of war. For while it is true

that the war increased the need for compliance and the top-down exercise of power, these styles of authority and decision-making only reinforced the preexisting patterns of power common to the patriarchal system -- patterns that historically lead to violence and war. Neither men nor women questioned this exercise of power or addressed the possibility of transforming it.

In order to be accepted, women had to excel as technicians, professionals, and leaders, and demonstrate an efficiency not only equal to but superior to that of men while simultaneously responding with the same dedication in the home. As one woman reflected:

> A man keeps to his own. If a man is working, that's his fundamental concern; he dedicates one hundred percent of his time to that because ninety nine percent of the men in this country have the rest of their problems resolved by a woman. Thus, all man's creative energy can be focused on his job. He goes to his home and it's like a hotel. All his problems have already been resolved; the children, the children's problems, all the family problems -- somebody takes care of them for him. He arrives, eats, sleeps, converses, does as he pleases. Not the woman. She can't dedicate one hundred percent of her vital energy to work since she is consumed by her domestic responsibilities in the family.

Women's ability to function effectively in leadership positions was limited by the double and triple shifts they had to perform as professionals, mothers, and wives. Their conditions in relation to men were inherently unequal. Nevertheless, these additional demands placed on women in positions of power were not recognized by the majority of them as inequalities. As one of them commented, "A woman

who is capable, hardworking and strong has the same employment opportunities as men."

In their discourse most maintained that they did not suffer any direct discrimination. Their precarious and contradictory subjectivity, even though it was undergoing a constant process of reconstitution, suffered from consciousness as oppressed women. These beliefs obviously affected their sense of solidarity with other women and their willingness to exercise power on behalf of change, which moves me to my next question.

3. How have Women Exercised Power in Nicaragua?

Women have many ways of expressing their subjectivity and at the same time are subjected, in any given historical context, to dominant power structures which demand compliant behavior.[33] In Nicaragua the patriarchal oppression of women has forced them to comply with and accept masculine work methods and ways of exercising power. In this situation, in a hierarchically ordered world, exacerbated by the phallocentric power that places them in a devalued position relative to men, women experienced accentuated competitiveness. Unlike men, they have enormous difficulties in identifying with one another. In admiration of what they are not and of what they do not have, and in

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[33] Subjectivity is understood as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself, and ways of comprehending her relation to the world" (Weedon, 1991: 32).

their need for power, they attempt to identify with men (Lagarde, 1990). Thus, they block their possibilities of constituting themselves as an alternative and complementary force.

In addition to the double or triple workdays exhausting them, the abilities demanded of them are greater. Women need to demonstrate strength and be cold, strict, rational, logical and calculating like men. Their feelings, emotions, capacity to handle many issues at the same time, particular ways of making sense of reality, tenderness and other supposed signs of "feminine weakness" are strongly repressed as their bodies have been since childhood, converting them into "mujeres con bigotes."[34] As one of the women interviewed expressed:

> You forget that you are a woman. You have to be strict, very strong because you will always find a rival in a man. Some accept your way of being but when you oppose them and prove men that you are right they become a rival who at any time will try to get back at you.

At the same time, if women are not sexually passive or virginal and modest in their appearance they are seen as "looking for it." Similarly, in many situations, they are expected to be sweet, "nice," and receptive to flirtation and sexual overtures if they want to keep their jobs or get promoted.

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[34] "Moustached women," a phrase commonly used in various sectors of the country to refer to women with masculine attitudes.

In the various institutions in which women participated during the Sandinista government, their numbers decreased at the higher decision-making levels. The majority of those interviewed occupied intermediate positions of power. Submissive toward their bosses and authoritarian toward their subordinates, they replicated the chauvinistic norms, values, and styles of the masculine exercise of power. Their actions were reduced to the administration or execution of important decisions made at higher levels dominated by men. In this fashion, they exercised power in an alienating way, "power-over," dominating and controlling others, yet deprived of real decision-making authority. They were the executioners of "orders." Ideas of "I can" and "for me" were not valid in the consciousness of most of these women who by their beliefs and behavior denied not only existing possibilities for resistance, but also dreams of creating new forms of exercising power.

The majority of the women indicated that they never had power, and also rejected it, though for different reasons. For example, one rejected it because she believed power corrupts while another rejected it because she always had someone above her and believed that is how it should be:

> Power I never had. I've attained some positions. I've been capable of making decisions but I've never had power nor do I like power. Power corrupts the individual, it isolates and destroys, it dehumanizes and it crushes.
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> The word power strikes me as crushing. I never saw myself as a person with power. I don't function like that, I have an aversion. I do what

> has to be done. I have a boss who tells me what to do, and I will always have a boss in my life. The search and struggle for power is not an important issue in my life. If that's the objective, it doesn't interest me.

Women also reproduced the patriarchal exercise of power from a position of subordination without recognizing it. We found that the development of a gender consciousness, when it occurred, manifested itself through the contradictions women saw between the demands of their jobs and their domestic roles rather than through questioning the patriarchal system as such. A broader analysis of the power relations in the different discourses and institutions of society was absent, thereby limiting the ability of women to develop effective strategies for change.

The positions of power they attained offered various possibilities for influence though they were always subject to the control of men and placed in traditionally feminine areas of work as Health and Social Welfare Ministers, or Directors of Education. However, in the great majority of the cases these women did not use their positions to heighten awareness of women's concerns nor did they resist or contest their subordinated position. The precarious level of their gender consciousness was demonstrated by their inability to generate and promote policies and actions in favor of women. Their gender unawareness was an obstacle to comprehending that any decision, although apparently egalitarian, affects men and women differently in all

spheres. As one interviewed woman commented regarding the definition of economic policies:

> When you are dealing with inflation, interest rates, relative prices... with how to make a credit policy for investment, how do women fit as women there? I don't know. These are more comprehensive problems... I was looking at some statistics and seeing the participation of women in the commerce sector which is enormous. Women are there. Well... will you treat them as women? I say, you treat them as merchants. The space for women as women, for their work and struggle, cannot be in the macroeconomic policies because from that moment you would establish discrimination. Men are as bad off as women... I believe that women's problems reside in another sphere, more than anything in the sphere of the family.

However, a few women who were able to attain a more critical level of consciousness acted differently. Through the Sandinista revolution's discourse of justice and transformation, the contradictions in their lives, and their access to feminist thought, possibilities were opened for multiple questioning. In asking questions and resisting structures of power they promoted significant changes benefitting women. They launched the discussion about reforming some of the existing laws and secured more protection and equality for women in the Constitution. They opened spaces in the federations and unions by forming caucuses specifically focused on and run by women. They initiated a massive process of consciousness-raising with respect to gender. This consciousness allowed an organized force of women to integrate itself into the revolutionary project with this vision. Through this influence, they

succeeded, among other things, in constructing childcare centers, promulgating laws on their behalf, and gaining access to jobs traditionally occupied by men. Some of them argue that they also sensitized certain men:

> I believe that we have helped in generating a conscious force from below in which women have been the protagonists... through this process some men, in the structures in which power is administered, have also become aware; we have made alliances with them to negotiate... These issues concern both men and women, to strengthen the material base of society ... to create political organizational conditions... to reach our goal together and be able to make a qualitative jump toward gender equality.

In any case, satisfaction was primarily obtained by the majority of these women as a function of their "givingness" and social recognition. They aspired to be recognized for their service to the country and to the poor regardless of the high quotas of sacrifice and masochism that their inequitable life situation demanded of them. In doing so, they disregarded the cost -- the detriment to their self-esteem and personal fulfilment.

In their struggles, the tensions, grief, responsibilities, and attitudes assumed in their public work invaded their intimate selves. Even though their economic situations permitted them to employ other women to partially take care of their domestic duties, the overall tension did not disappear. They felt dissatisfied, without time and energy for themselves. Their work outside the home often started at seven in the morning and ended thirteen or fourteen hours later, spilling over the weekends and late

evenings at home. They neglected their intimate spaces, dreams and relations with their partners and children for their work and revolutionary commitment. As two women recall their experiences:

> I left my work at 8:30 at night and went with my computer and stacks of paper to work at home. When you are under pressure like this, where does the lettuce and tomato fit in? The moment that you begin to make room for the lettuce, tomatoes, buttons and holey socks, it is terrible.
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> The pressures on us are upsetting because if you are in a position of responsibility and you want to place yourself at the same level as a man who doesn't have all those responsibilities it cannot be done any other way than at the expense of the domestic realm... your children will be neglected, your children will not see you, the house is a disaster, there's no food, things are falling apart and you start to feel bad about everything. Bad mother, bad wife, and here women begin to give up.

The power relations in the family, in which the man usually has more power over the woman and she, in turn, more power over the children, are traditionally seen as part of a natural order decreed by God guaranteeing the division of labor in the family. This situation prevents men from developing any sense of solidarity with women over issues of equity or responsibility. The administration of the home, shopping for food and clothes, taking the children to the doctor, helping them with their homework, meeting their emotional needs, staying up at night when they are sick, and taking care of them and of the husband are all tasks performed by women in accordance with their internalized roles. The limitations that they experience generate

violent internal conflicts and deep feelings of incompetence and guilt not only over their failure to execute their duties with the expected efficiency, but also over the hysterical and violent means by which they sometimes exercise a masculine type of "power-over" their children.

A majority of the women experience great instability in trying to liberate their oppressed voices. Most of their husbands, partners, or lovers find it practically impossible to accept "their" women's participation in public spaces much less their professional and/or political success. As one woman stated:

> When I had my children things got worse. I couldn't stand that he didn't meet his family responsibilities. I had the whole burden of the kids plus my job, where they demanded that I work as hard as he did. He tried a few times to help me, to bottle-feed them, play with them, go to the market, but he did it all with the humor of a dog until I couldn't stand it anymore. The fighting was tremendous and I left him.

Women suffer great changes and serious crises in their relationships when they are no longer only housewives. In many cases, men's jealousy, competition, and multiple sexual relationships induce them to abandon their wives. In this new situation, without a partner, they feel frightened and incomplete, suffering from unresolved loneliness. As one expressed:

> I don't like being alone. I have a lot of problems with it. I get depressed, a frightening sense of abandonment consumes me; it makes me feel lost, I feel empty. I see darkness everywhere, I get scared. I haven't been able to solve the problem of claiming my place as a woman on this earth. I have lived for many years with someone

> by my side... my tree that was a shade to sleep under, I lay down and he protected me... I have not been able to free myself... I like being taken care of, being babied... being cuddled and held.

Furthermore, after a separation, women must bear alone the burden of economic and emotional support for their children.

> The men go and don't even leave enough for food and clothing. But even more, a child needs the moral, emotional backing, the psychological support that a father should provide. This cannot be a task solely for the mother.

Only in a few cases have women experienced a different kind of relationship. They can count on husbands or partners who have also developed a certain sense of gender equality, sharing some of the domestic work and allowing a greater liberty and understanding. This different relationship, not without tension, results in a more fluid and less problematic way of relating to each other.

Despite these few exceptions, the fatigue and anxieties experienced by the majority of women as a result of numerous conflicts with their partners, plus the childhood repression mentioned earlier, are reflected in their sexuality. As one of them expressed:

> My sexuality has been very frustrated, blocked. It's a very complicated problem because I'm sure that one has many traumas, many conditionings. Orgasm is important but it isn't the most important thing... in certain moments I can completely let go of myself... without being self-conscious, but at other times I'm sort of watching myself and that spoils it. I'm analyzing what happens... what I'm going to do and I am too conscious to be spontaneous, so then things become a little too forced.

Women who have lived in a couple relationship and then lived alone, as the one quoted above, express themselves more freely about their sexuality than do married women. Most married women are militant on the Right, support traditional family life and are more resistant to talking about their sexuality. One of the women interviewed could not even mention the word "sexuality" when asked about it, as we can observe in her following statement:

> We [my husband and I] don't talk about that nor do I discuss those things with anyone because I have always believed that there are things you don't discuss with anyone. I never asked my friends about that. We've had other anxieties of the political type... We haven't had this kind of problem. I've followed the same norms as my mother because in some things I am very conservative. I don't allow my daughters to go out of the house at night.

Female passivity and the denial of their bodies and desires were continually reinforced in almost all of these women's homes and the social institutions in which they participated. Nevertheless, woman's subjectivity is continually recreated. In day-to-day life, women laugh, suffer, dream, compare, feel. Spaces for creativity, resistance and transformation are open for them in spite of their condition as societal victims. Women in Nicaragua found themselves with each other, their husbands, lovers, children, friends and bosses, interacting in different rhythms of continuity. In these processes a few of them in positions of power struggled fiercely, protesting against their oppression. They joined forces with women at the

grassroots level, obtaining major achievements on their behalf, which have already been mentioned.

4. Conclusions

The access to positions of power during the Sandinista government unquestionably allowed women to take part in important decisions. However, their role was one of implementor and administrator of decisions made by men in higher positions of the various government, party, and union structures in which they participated. In conclusion, I will summarize how women in power responded to the system of patriarchy found in Nicaragua. Three types of responses can be identified.

A first group was successful in maintaining their positions and even obtaining eventual promotions. They had the ability to play the game of the system, aptly responding to the dominant norms. They adjusted by making significant efforts to maintain their positions, often experiencing great conflicts and tension. They achieved self-affirmation and recognition mainly based on their disciplined obedience to orders from their superiors. They adopted male authoritarian styles and arrogance frequently drawing upon a certain class confidence and a certain gender consciousness that some of them developed. They did not influence the definition of policies on behalf of women in a significant way.

A second group was displaced gradually by men to lower positions of authority allegedly because of inefficiency, pregnancies, political and ideological differences, and "personality conflicts" among other reasons. Not without fear, some of them resisted the male exercise of "power-over" others. In spite of multiple efforts to adjust to the rules of the patriarchal power game, they were not able to comply with the demands imposed upon them or to resist pressures and gender discrimination. Even so they managed to maintain themselves within the institutional structures.

The third group constitutes the women who were ultimately removed or who removed themselves from their positions. Some withdrew from public life when conditions of fatigue, rejection and constant crisis became unbearable. Some left the country unable or unwilling to adjust to the terrible conditions caused by the military aggression and the economic blockade of the U.S. government. This war, besides subordinating all programs and projects of social and economic benefit to defense, resulted in an economic crisis they couldn't accept. The lower salaries, along with the lack of recognition for their efforts to excel technically undoubtedly resulted in their withdrawal.

In summary, on the positive side, women's insertion into positions of power inarguably constituted a major social advancement. From these positions some deepened their gender consciousness and attained important benefits

and protection for women. Yet the lives of these women were reoriented at a high cost to them. Many lived deeply conflict-ridden, guilty, insecure and lonely lives. Their entrance into positions of authority without major transformations of the system forced them to adopt the ideologies and masculine forms of exercising power. They had to learn to accept single motherhood, the invasion of their public jobs into everyday life, and crises in their family relationships. Paradoxically, their access to those positions encouraged the development of gender consciousness in Nicaragua, but prevented the evolution of a consciousness that would permit them to increase their numbers, build coalitions, and stimulate new forms of struggle. For the most part, as Maxine Molyneux has stated, an economic, political, and social participation and mobilization occurred in Nicaragua without real emancipation. These women, particularly those who did not significantly develop a gender consciousness, replicated and repeated their subordination.

Ironically, in the last several years following the Sandinista defeat, a major rise in gender consciousness has occurred -- a rise based on openings and questions that emerged from the Revolution and from its female leaders. The confrontation with the new government's neo-liberal policies and traditional views of gender relations has challenged the Nicaraguan women's movement in new ways.

The need to create more inclusive, effective forms of power becomes even more urgent in the face of government policies that are overturning the advances made by women under the Revolution. How women come together now and learn from past experiences, within their diversity and the different levels where they operate, will help determine their ability to change these discriminatory policies and reshape the future.

CHAPTER VI

AN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE WITH WOMEN

During the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, a dilemma arose over how to reconcile the needs of various social groups with their own leaders' appeals. The problem was that of advancing processes of transformation which would fulfil the general objectives of the revolution -- proposed by the leaders -- while simultaneously resolving the immediate needs of the groups those leaders represented. These leaders' vision had to contemplate and promote flexibility, criticism and creativity in those social groups, generating new forms of participation and relations between themselves and their constituencies.

Some women in Nicaragua chose gender relations as a starting point for understanding and acting on the overdetermined global reality. Within processes that presented some possibilities for outbursts but which also silenced, many women sought to have their voices heard from their particular oppressed condition, which tainted other dimensions of their reality. Their challenge, in the educational sphere, consisted of promoting experiences that transgressed dominant masculine parameters and affected the public and private dimensions of women's lives -- experiences recognizing not only the diverse forms of oppression that women are subjected to in the public and private spheres, but also the numerous efforts,

contradictions and conquests involved in their struggle for empowerment, efforts which have been referred to in earlier chapters of this work.

Below I address an educational program undertaken by the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Women's Association (AMNLAE) in Region IV of the country, which was meant to be reproduced on a national level but was interrupted by its leaders. This educational experience attempted to generate more participatory and democratic work methods in AMNLAE from the specificities of women. In addition, while encompassing a popular perspective, it sought to provoke an analysis of the relationship between the public and private spheres and to assess the implications of a new feminist theoretical, strategic and pedagogical vision. The experience thus posed new questions to the current conception of popular education.

A. The Context of the Experience

In March of 1987, the FSLN publicized its Women's Proclamation, marking a new phase for AMNLAE.[1] It declared AMNLAE to be the fundamental organization for promoting ideological transformations in men and women needed to confront machismo -- with the ultimate objective of increasing the participation of women in the general tasks of the Revolution. To this end, promoters of AMNLAE were to

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[1] A historical description of AMNLAE is presented in the second section of Chapter V.

insert themselves in various mass organizations (UNAG, ATC, CDS, etc.) which represented female workers, peasants, villagers, etc.. The purpose was to promote and support consciousness-raising over women's subordinated condition through specific women's groups. Such a process had already been initiated by some of the Women's Secretariats that had been formed in many of the aforementioned organizations. AMNLAE claimed to be the articulating organism of all these Secretariats and prepared a Platform of Struggle which it sought to promote through each of these entities.

In this context, political ideological work became a priority within AMNLAE. So far, the group's work had focused on radio propaganda, the preparing posters, organizing women for mobilizations, and organizing and catering to the Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs. The few training programs that had already been implemented had revolved mainly around technical questions such as the use of cameras and tape recorders, group dynamics, legal affairs, and so on. The organization had no overall work strategy nor any particular educational strategy. The challenge arose, then, of encouraging discussion on the recently formulated Proclamation and Platform of Struggle.

To that end, we in the Department of Training of AMNLAE assumed the task of developing a Training Program for the Promoters and Grassroots Leaders of AMNLAE and a Work Strategy for the Executive and National Committees of

AMNLAE.[2] Through its work strategy, the leadership aimed to revise the current Platform for Struggle and to seek new relational models for the interaction of AMNLAE and the Secretariats of other organizations based on the organizational conception proposed in the Proclamation. At first, the head of the Training Department proposed a National Training Plan which comprehensively covered both initiatives -- the Program and the Plan -- in addition to other necessary actions directed at each level: grassroots, regional and national. This strategic National Training Plan had been conceived as permanent and was to be divided into a sequence of phases. The plan linked training to organizational development, that is, to the day-to-day tasks and planning of the movement. It proposed to include leaders at various levels in the promotion of a participatory democratic gender consciousness-raising process from the grassroots -- between sectors, between levels -- to advance the articulated unity and organization of women in Nicaragua (de Montis, 1987). This proposal was not accepted by the leadership of AMNLAE.[3] Therefore, we

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[2] The National Committee of AMNLAE was composed of the various General Secretariats of the mass organizations' Secretariats and the Executive Committee of AMNLAE. The latter consisted of the General Director and the (female) directors of the departments of International Relations, Propaganda, and Organization at the national level of AMNLAE as well as AMNLAE's regional directors. For an overview of the Program see: de Montis, 1988.

[3] In other parts of this work, references are made to the tensions, competition, power struggles, and so on, experienced between various women leaders at the time.

tried to articulate further the pilot experience in Region IV and the work plan for the directive committees that had been approved.

In this section I will make some reflections on the pilot experience in Region IV that was approved and implemented and specifically refer to lessons and limitations in its objectives, methodology and development. To execute this program, coordinations were established with other groups dedicated to working with women. An advisory team was formed by female officials from the Women's Institute and the Women's Section of the Agrarian Reform Research Center (CIERA), in which some international consultants also participated on a sporadic basis. The program proposed the following:

General Objective:

To contribute to the unity and leadership of the Women's Movement, AMNLAE, by means of a permanent training process promoting participatory, democratic work methods.

Specific Objectives:

1. To study and internalize the Women's Proclamation of the Sandinista Front, the new political-organizational

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Somehow, that resulted in the fact that a national plan was not accepted under the argument that it was too ambitious. In addition, though it was not made explicit, there were political and ideological differences between the leaders of AMNLAE and women who identified themselves as "feminists" and hoped to further that cause in a context in which the concept of feminism was rejected and feared.

conception of the Women's Movement, and the Platform of Struggle.

2. To define the role for promoters and grassroots leaders in light of that new organizational conception.

3. To develop gender consciousness.

4. To acquire knowledge and tools regarding popular education and participatory research.

5. To promote and coordinate the implementation of participatory research in each of the particular sectors in which promoters and grassroots leaders work (factories, cooperatives, neighborhoods, etc.) which will allow diagnoses to be made of the situation for women in those spaces.

6. To coordinate the preparation of particular platforms of struggle in each of those workplaces and contrast them with the national Platform of Struggle.

7. To become familiar with the participants' training demands.

B. The Methodological Conception

The method proposed for the program was based on the principle of practice-theory-practice. The goal was to provoke a process of reflection over the particular labor practice of each participant -- in light of the Proclamation, the Platform of Struggle and certain theoretical elements of gender -- allowing an individual to recreate that practice and ultimately define sector-specific

platforms of struggle. From these, in turn, would emerge a definition of the overall objectives of the National Platform of Struggle. Likewise, this process of reflection and action would facilitate the preparation of the promoters' and grassroots leaders' respective work plans aiming to promote those platforms in local sectors and on a national level. It was proposed that women share experiences of their problems in public and private realms and lessons acquired through their struggles as participants in the labor force through meetings, encuentros and workshops. Facilitators in the program would present some gender theoretical, methodological and technical elements so that participants might acquire the necessary tools for conducting participatory research in their sectors.[4] These new elements presented by the facilitators would in turn be compared to, validated by, and enriched with the pedagogical experiences of the participants themselves.

Taking into account the specificities of each sector -- seasonal needs, daily schedules, etc. -- women would begin to carry out participatory research in order to make sector-specific diagnoses. From these diagnoses, platforms of struggle and work plans would be prepared.[5] During the

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[4] For an understanding of what is meant by participatory research, based on the same methodological principle as popular education, practice-theory-practice, see Vio Grossi, 1980; Lovisolo, 1987; Le Boterf, 1982.

[5] In turn, those sectoral outcomes would be forwarded to the higher levels of the Association -- through the other activity carried out by the Training Department,

entire process participatory evaluations of the work would be made. Once the platforms of struggle and respective work plans had been completed, an overall evaluation of the experience would follow.

C. Participants Proposed for the Program [6]

The following participants were proposed for the program:

1. AMNLAE' s promoters and grassroots leaders in the region.
2. The Executive Secretariat of AMNLAE in Region IV -- composed of a General Secretary and those in charge of Training and Organization.
3. The promoters of Region IV delegated from the various Women's Secretariats in mass organizations (CST, UNAG, ATC, CDS, etc.).
4. One delegate from the mass organizations' training teams in Region IV.
5. The training team of AMNLAE'S national Training Department responsible for the programs' coordination.

"The Work Plan for the Executive and National Committees of AMNLAE" -- to detect overall objectives and make already proposed revisions of the National Platform.

[6] The great majority of the participants had not completed their secondary education. Many had only attended primary school. Only at the higher levels of the organizational structures were there some women with a few years of university education.

6. Delegates of the AMNLAE Training Departments in other regions who, in turn, would help coordinate the program.

D. Phases of the Program

It was proposed that the Program be divided into four phases which were: a) Sensitization b) Diagnosis c) Preparation and implementation of platforms of struggle and work plans and d) Follow-up and evaluations.

1. Sensitization Phase

In this phase the program would be presented to the National Committee of AMNLAE and the Executive Committee of Region IV for its approval, support and participation whenever necessary. Likewise, a meeting was proposed with the Executive Committee of Region IV to plan the following actions: definition and placement of AMNLAE promoters in different sectors, factories, cooperatives, neighborhoods, etc.; collection and study of existing information about the sectors and Region IV to lend context to the work;[7] presentation, by promoters and leaders participating in the program, of information that they considered important for the preparation of diagnosis questionnaires; preparation of lists of participants that would attend the Program.

2. Diagnosis Phase

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[7] The various popular organizations, the FSLN and the Government Delegation periodically promoted different efforts to gather information on the economic, social, political etc. situation of the region.

In this phase a three-day workshop would be conducted for the following purposes: a) reflecting and analyzing information gathered on the sectors and the region b) acquiring the theoretical tools necessary to make diagnoses and c) preparating work plans for making diagnoses.

3. Phase of preparation and implementation of the platforms of struggle and work plans

For this phase three workshops per sector were proposed to analyze the information gathered through the diagnoses and to prepare the platform of struggle proposals in each sector from a gender perspective. Those workshops would be broken down as a) an intersectoral workshop to evaluate respective platforms, define common objectives and acquire certain skills to prepare work plans b) an active workshop for the preparation of work plans and c) an evaluative workshop for the evaluation of the work done so far, and the preparation of criteria for implementation, control and follow-up of the work plans.

4. Follow-up and evaluation of the work

In this phase, the educational experience would be followed-up through periodic evaluations of the work plans in the framework of the specific organization's planning and evaluation processes.

E. Development of the Program

Three of the proposed Program phases were carried out. In the second, 37 promoters and leaders coordinated

diagnoses in which 2,303 people participated at the grassroots level; 1,171 women in the neighborhoods; 395 female industrial workers and 837 male and female peasants located in 66 neighborhoods, 9 industries, 21 cooperatives and 33 rural communities in Region IV (de Montis, 1988). These diagnoses revealed the particular work conditions of women and some of their day-to-day problems; the progress made in their struggles; the organizational forms in their jobs; and the tension experienced with their bosses, directors and political leaders of mass organizations -- almost all male -- as well as with promoters and leaders of the movement itself.

Grassroots women in all sectors expressed which characteristics they desired in their leaders: they ought to be linked to the grassroots and be self-critical; ought to plan their work considering the reality of women in the sectors; and ought to be humble, using accessible language and methods for planning and work evaluation. Likewise, they noted the following oppressive situations: physical abuse by men, economic dependency on their husbands, the double shift, low technical qualifications, reproduction of the roles in the family, the existence of discriminating laws, and low levels of education and political-ideological training.

In the third phase, platforms of struggle incorporating the women's demands were prepared as well as the women's respective work plans. By means of periodic evaluations,

participants expressed their satisfaction with having participated in the program. Through it, they had acquired the ability to systematize and analyze their particular realities, to distinguish between immediate and strategic gender needs, and to perform their work using important technical and methodological tools.

The fourth phase of the program was not carried out, nor was its initially proposed reproduction in other regions of the country. In addition, the promoters' work plans were soon reformulated. These interruptions were justified on the grounds of "other priorities" and the lack of human and financial resources.

F. Limitations and Other Reflections on the Program

The Training Program for Promoters and Grassroots Leaders of AMNLAE was proposed at a moment in which women's groups in the country -- AMNLAE, the Secretariats, NGOs and others -- had different visions, conceptualizations and paths to follow in their struggle. In this context and based on certain political spaces that had been obtained -- some of these acquired by self-declared feminists in the training staff of AMNLAE -- the program sought to define a strategy from and for the empowerment of women with a gender perspective, which would allow different women's groups to experience unity within their diversity. However, serious limitations arose in the implementation of the program which prevented its further development.

Limitations -- noted by participants themselves in the evaluation conducted at the end of the third phase -- included, from an operative point of view, the lack of support on behalf of upper-level leaders and the advisory team, and sporadic absences of the promoters and leaders involved. The latter were constantly assigned to perform tasks in other sectors -- while it was indispensable, if the program was to succeed, for them to remain in one single sector, be it the peasantry, female industrial workers, etc. -- or were assigned to other regions altogether. The association's "conjuncturalist" and vertical work methods therefore prevailed. Also, participants pointed out the limitation of not having tested the questionnaire used for diagnoses beforehand, which would have enabled them to write it in a more accessible language. Nevertheless, the main factor that influenced the course of the program and led to its termination was political and ideological tension, which was reflected principally in the definition of its content and methodology.

The content of the program encouraged a greater understanding of the construction of gender and its relation to class; a deeper comprehension of the interdependence of public and private realms; and a more complex analysis indicating that some economic, social, cultural and political circumstances and problems of the "public" sphere originate in or are interwoven with the untouchable, hidden "private" realm of daily life and the family. In addition,

the contents allowed participants to distinguish, to a certain extent, between strategic and immediate gender needs, enabling them to plan their work from a liberating perspective.[8] However, for the leaders of AMNLAE such contents could "confuse" women and were considered too "subversive," potentially provoking conflicts with men, and for that reason could not be allowed at a time in which all energy needed to be channelled toward popular unity for defense against military aggression, resolution of overall economic problems, and other priorities of the Revolution. It is worth noting, though, that the Program obviously took into consideration the national context of war and economic urgencies but sought to reconcile the steps that needed to

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[8] For a deeper understanding of what is meant by this distinction and its use for planning see: Moser, 1989. In this work, Moser "outlined the essential components of a planning approach which, in incorporating gender into planning, challenges Western planning stereotypes. Its conceptual rationale is based on the identification of the triple role of women and the necessity of making a fundamental analytical distinction between practical and strategic gender needs. The methodological tools identified simplify complex theoretical feminist concerns relating both to the productive, reproductive and community managing roles of women, and to the nature of their gender subordination, such that they can be translated into specific interventions in planning practice" (40). Drawing on Maxine Molyneux's differentiation between practical and strategic gender interests, Moser defines "strategic gender needs as those needs which are formulated from the analysis of women's subordination to men... [I]n contrast, practical gender needs are those needs which are formulated from the concrete conditions women experience, in their engendered position within the sexual division of labor, and deriving out of this their practical gender interests for human survival" (10-11).

be taken with an overall perspective including the specificities of women.

The methodology employed questioned the bureaucratic, authoritarian and vertical work methods of the organization. It fostered a more horizontal relationship between teachers and students which challenged the traditional relations of "banking" (knowledge-depositing) education. The program proposed new forms of relations between grassroots and leaders, between levels and between sectors -- for example, by contrasting the Platform of Struggle proposed by upper levels of leadership with the platforms of struggle derived from the diagnoses and modifying it accordingly -- thereby avoiding impositions and "orders" and seeking joint decision-making between leaders and grassroots. Indeed, the program led to reflections over alternative, more democratic and autonomous ways of functioning in AMNLAE, in other mass organizations and between these and the FSLN. However, these reflections were regarded with fear by the leaders, who sought recourse in the cancellation of the program.

Conclusion

Through this educational experience, the contradiction between popular education as it had traditionally been conceived and a feminist education for and from women was to a certain extent resolved. Both educational processes share the approach of using the oppressed student's experience as a point of departure, enabling his or her conversion from

passive object into a subject of change. However, the former has based itself on a class analysis that considers the proletariat to be the locomotive of social transformation and as such has been directed at popular sectors and movements. Importantly, this effort at education for and from women -- based on a gender analysis -- added women's oppression to the class analysis.

This introduction of gender to a previously strictly class analysis was expected to contribute to the develoment of a frame of reference which, uniting content and methodology, would merge the analysis of immediate needs with a theoretical and strategic analysis, generating new power relations which create the theory demanded by the methodology of practice-theory-practice. The effort seems to have allowed participants to further understand their oppression as well as the concept of immediate versus strategic needs. The women in the workshops, however, emphasized immediate over strategic needs and thus limited the creation of the broader frame of reference necessary for comprehensively understanding the problems experienced by women in Nicaragua and ultimately searching for solutions.

The participants' greater concern with immediate over strategic needs was partly influenced by the limitations presented by the facilitators of the program, who, while presenting some theoretical elements for distinguishing between the two, did not provoke a deeper analysis by probing more intimate spaces of subordination -- affections,

the negation of body and sexuality, emotions, guilt and other insecurities. Nor did they use techniques that allowed participants to more extensively tackle other aspects of their daily lives or to question masculine discourses, epistemologies and structures of thought. In turn, if the methodology meant to address the transformation of consciousness that takes place in the intersection of three agencies -- the facilitator, the rest of the participants, and the knowledge they produce together -- the facilitators also failed to the extent that they did not share their own circumstances of oppression with the others.

Regarding popular education's objective of generating participatory and democratic forms in society, this experience inarguably contributed important elements toward understanding and achieving such forms. First, the vanguard relationship between leaders and grassroots -- which prevails in organizations of the Left -- began to be questioned. Also, it showed that power relations between facilitators and participants should be addressed and analyzed in the educational process itself; in this experience that did not happen.

Although AMNLAE continued to promote training activities, it has mainly been other experiences with women -- launched from other spaces with more autonomy from AMNLAE and the Party -- that have contributed new and enriching thematic challenges to gender consciousness-raising and democratization. Through research on subordination, the

compilation of women's life stories, theater, dance, sexuality workshops, reclamation of their bodies and recognition of the oppression experienced in them, in their affections and in their spirituality, and through validation of the subjective aspects of human experience, women in Nicaragua have begun to define a feminist pedagogy which allows a redefinition of power and deepening of democratic practice.[9] That pedagogy has been enriched by popular education -- to the extent that it emphasizes the commitment to transform unjust power relations -- but has also been innovative, generating new paradigms for "consciousness-raising" seeking to transform the world from where women stand: from the particular "situation" of each individual and women's shared historical "condition."[10]

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[9] Feminism is understood as women's response and protagonistic action from their gendered condition to subvert the power that reproduces their oppression. It emerges and is defined in the face of power (Lagarde, 1990).

[10] In Cautiverios de las Mujeres: Madresposas, Monjas, Putas, Presas y Locas, Marcela Lagarde makes the following distinction between the categories of "women's historical condition" and "women's situation": "The historical condition is the aggregate of circumstances, qualities and essential characteristics that define woman as a gendered being... [W]omen's condition is a historic creation... to the extent that it is different from the natural, opposed to so-called feminine nature. In other words, the aggregate of qualities and characteristics attributed to women -- forms of behavior, attitudes, intellectual and physical abilities, their place in economic and social relations and the oppression they are subjected to -- whose origin and dialectic transcend history and belong, for half of humanity, to biological, innate determinants linked to sex" (65). On the other hand, women's situation refers: "to the aggregate of characteristics that women have in their gendered condition in certain historical circumstances. Situation expresses

Moreover, having recognized women's diversity, this feminist pedagogy continues to develop an analysis that incorporates the interdependence and interaction of numerous forms of oppression experienced by individuals in society. Thereby, it has opened paths for creativity and for the definition of new political projects and innovative educational alternatives which from the particular interests of each oppressed group do not lose sight of necessary comprehensive transformations.

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the concrete existence of particular women in their actual life conditions: the social formation in which each is born, lives and dies, the relations of production-reproduction and thereby of class, their class group, what they do for a living, their definition in relation to maternity, marriage and parenting, their family adherence as well as life standards and access to material and symbolic goods, ethnicity, language, religion, political definitions, age group, relations with other women, men and power, erotic preferences, customs, their own traditions, knowledge and wisdom, learning skills, creativity and capacity for change, survival skills, personal subjectivity, self-identity and particular conception of the world and of life" (67 [emphasis added]).

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Although there may not be any clear consensus in Latin America over the concept of popular education, its intention to transform power relations in underdeveloped societies is widely recognized; the effort to organize and "raise consciousness" among the oppressed; its empowerment and development of democracy; and its methodological conception of practice-theory-practice which aims to transform those involved from objects into subjects of the educational process. Its connection with popular movements, and in the case of Nicaragua, with revolutionary history, is similarly acknowledged.

This work makes a critique of the methods of popular education developed during the Sandinista government in Nicaragua from the practice and reflection of women. From a feminist position, and based on an analysis of women's situations -- in historical terms and in the public and private realms -- it argues that a masculine epistemological framework prevailed. That is, a male logic and way of thinking predominated in popular education arenas.[1] Similarly, a class analysis prevailed, limiting the flow of energy, creativity, and potential from and within the

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[1] I am not seeking to re-entrench archaic dualisms or oppositions between male-female, public-private, etc. Rather, I would advocate exploring possibilities for complementarities between different forms of logic.

various women's groups in the country. Therefore, reality was not understood dialectically and its transformation focused on the public realm, the sphere of production, at the expense of the sphere of reproduction.[2] It addressed the resolution of immediate needs and the development of a socio-political national consciousness while neglecting the private and intimate realm, the resolution of strategic gender needs, and the generation of an overall vision which would include different forms of oppression and other complexities that also constitute an integral part of reality.

During the eleven years of revolutionary government in Nicaragua, profound changes were sought to resolve questions of national sovereignty, democracy, and development -- questions similar to those produced by social revolutions in other underdeveloped countries (Vilas, 1991). A revolutionary project was declared and developed involving a mixed economy, a multi-party system, sovereignty, non-alignment, aiming to benefit historically marginalized groups and to construct popular power. To that end -- and despite the profound implications of being constantly immersed in an interventionist war sponsored by the U.S. government -- changes in the socioeconomic structure and political system were implemented which enabled all

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[2] In the context of popular education, when reality is understood dialectically, it means that supposed "opposites," such as private and public spheres, are reconciled in a synthesis.

Nicaraguans and especially the popular sectors to participate in the project.

Beyond the difficulties that emerge in attempting to specify the term "popular" -- a term which in most Latin American countries refers to the marginalized poor who comprise the majority of the population -- its use, when referring to the popular power sought by the Sandinista revolution and to popular education in general, was based on a class analysis which considered the proletariat to be the oppressed sector and engine of change. In this context, other relations of domination present in the Nicaraguan social fabric, between the sexes, ethnic groups, generations, and so on, if taken into consideration at all, were perceived as secondary.

Regarding relations between the sexes, an education for and from women which seeks to eliminate their oppression begins with the individual woman, her daily and personal experience, so that she subsequently can reflect about the world and the need to change it. However, daily experience in the domestic realm -- including the gendered division of labor; women's almost exclusive responsibility for the children and for ideological reproduction in the private sphere; their double and triple shifts; and feelings of guilt and insecurity that impede women's empowerment -- were not confronted as aspects of practice or "reality" in most of the popular education processes that unfolded. Nor was there any analysis of norms, values, customs, religious

beliefs and ideologies prevalent in Nicaraguan culture which cover up the politics of the private realm and tie women to a form of domestic imprisonment. This lack of analysis limited the generation of theories (through practice-theory-practice popular education methodology) which would have facilitated necessary changes in the interwoven systems of domination, and thereby opened possibilities for greater democratic conquests in the revolution.

Popular education for women's empowerment must promote a validation of the private sphere and subjectivity and reject the predominant conception that reality is known in and composed of only objective, rational facts, according to the hegemonic forms of masculine thought. For women, objective information becomes relevant only to the extent that it is combined with other aspects of reality, such as emotions and intuition. In this sense, "consciousness-raising" from a gender perspective requires the articulation of objective and subjective dimensions in the process of practice-theory-practice promulgated by popular education methodology.

The body -- which feels, smells, listens and observes -- must likewise be validated. The dominant norms and ideologies which oppress it are expressed through verbal and non-verbal language. As Orlando Núñez has written, the body is the place where "class domination, sexual oppression and the social identities of men and women connect" (1988: 267).

Together with emotions, knowledge and imagination, it shapes reality and allows it to be understood. However, repression and violence are mechanisms through which women's bodies continue to be controlled by men independently of the class, nationality, ethnic group or socialist/capitalist sytem in which they exist. The objectification of women's bodies -- by means of controlled reproduction and the understanding that their main function consists of bearing children to the world -- and the negation of sensual and sexual pleasures express the profound ways in which women internalize and accept subordination; that objectification and negation must be denounced in liberating educational processes. Reproductive rights, possibilities for pleasure, tenderness and eroticism therefore become important topics to be included in popular education agendas in order for women to acquire the critical consciousness necessary for liberating their creative energies and encouraging them to participate fully in the creation of a new culture -- a new culture which expresses the multitude of oppressed groups' desires for justice.

Reclaiming their bodies, sexuality, subjectivity, and emotions, and denouncing the unjust sexual division of labor allows women to deconstruct and reconstruct their subordinated identity. Only in this way -- by dismantling the hidden mechanisms that imprison them -- does it become possible for women to affirm and promote their self-esteem

and their role as social subjects. As Mimi Orner comments on the shifting definition of self:

> Unlike the term 'individual,' the term 'subject' encourages us to think of ourselves and our realities as constructions: the products of signifying or meaning-making activities which are both culturally specific and generally unconscious. The term 'subject' calls into question the notion of a totally conscious self. The 'subject' is always both conscious and unconscious. (Luke and Gore, eds., 1992: 79)

In turn, to the extent that women denounce in public the various forms of oppression in the private dimension, the personal and private is politicized, and politics and the public world can be humanized. Women can then act in the public sphere with greater security and possibilities for transforming power relations there -- in paid labor, organizations, political parties, communities or other public spaces where they participate -- which, interconnected with the concealment of the domestic realm, sustain and perpetuate "rational," "calculating," and supposedly "objective" patriarchal domination. This confrontation, in addition, facilitates the exploration of new ways of exercising power opposed to the prevailing alienating, vertical and authoritarian forms.

The Sandinista revolution created possibilities for women to participate as citizens -- in various popular organizations -- carrying out numerous tasks imposed by the revolutionary project. The great majority of them thereby were incorporated into the public sphere, working double or triple shifts while unaware of their subordinated situation.

Most of the popular education and "consciousness-raising" processes that were undertaken did not transcend those double and triple work shifts nor the other grievances mentioned above. They mainly addressed the resolution of women's immediate needs on a local level (nourishment for children, hygiene and community clean-ups, sewing projects, bakeries, beauty salons, raising pigs and poultry, acquiring technical skills, etc.), without contemplating their strategic needs (seeking to change the sexual division of labor, safeguarding their bodies, reducing the burden of domestic work, eliminating institutionalized forms of discrimination, achieving freedom of choice in reproduction, etc.) which would have allowed the development of a critical consciousness. The male and female popular educators in Nicaragua concentrated mainly on organizing and coordinating the execution of these types of micro level tasks excluding a gender strategic perspective. They also coordinated tasks at a macro level considered to reflect the national interests involved in defense, the needs of the Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs, harvests etc., again excluding a gender strategic perspective. In this way, activities promoted by popular education focused on the resolution of women's immediate needs rather than strategic needs both on the local and comprehensive levels.

Although collective actions toward resolving immediate survival needs are fundamental to popular education, in most Nicaraguan cases, they reinforced the sexual division of

labor and women's traditional roles. The tension therefore arose in popular education between reinforcing those roles or altering them and deconstructing their subordinated identities. This tension, in turn, presented the challenge of alleviating problems of survival while at the same time moving women toward strategic, nontraditional political and economic spaces allowing them to overcome their marginalization.

Male and female popular educators were trained in and had a better grasp of various techniques, groups dynamics and topics related to the resolution of immediate local problems, at the expense of a greater awareness of methodological aspects of popular education or other theoretical contents required for a more holistic understanding of reality. Also, they discussed the validity of academic, "scientific" research versus (micro) participatory research, and wondered what the former might really offer for understanding (macro) comprehensive "truth." In this context, academic research, which can contribute important contents for the instruction of both popular educator and participant, was restricted. The generation of important information needed in order to be contrasted with, validated by or rejected by the participants' local experiences was thus hampered. In other words, an obstacle was posed to the articulation of knowledge between the popular sectors and educators in the educational process that allows the generation of new

knowledge and the creative return to practice, to reality, in order to transform it. What resulted, then, actually prevented the ideal practice-theory-practice model that the popular educators attempted to create.

This problematic that emerged in the contents of popular education processes was exacerbated by the relations between the political leadership of the FSLN and the bases. Although the traditional "banking" education paradigm -- by which the educator "deposits" knowledge in his or her students -- was denounced and criticized as vertical, authoritarian, acritical and official in the educational process, the verticalism that predominated in political leadership escaped criticism. That verticalism inarguably influenced the relationship between educators and participants in a revolutionary process where there existed a very close relationship between the political leadership, the mass organizations, and the rest of the national actors. Despite the fact that popular educators effectively sought more horizontal methods of relating with participants, the majority of the educational content was defined by bureaucratic leaders of the programs, and when these "orientations" were lowered from the political leadership, "conjuncturalism" and party discipline had the upper hand. Here, as in other contexts examined in this work, the methodology of popular education was hampered in its intention to develop a critical consciousness that would

question precisely the relations of domination existing in the various dimensions of life.

Women did make important advances, however, in revolutionary Nicaragua. Their participation in the various activities of the public sphere -- armed struggle, organizations, and various social and economic projects -- catalyzed the emergence of feminist viewpoints that were incorporated into revolutionary documents and certain popular education programs. Exiting from their domestic imprisonment, although it implied a greater physical and emotional exhaustion for women (for they had to compete with other members of their sex and with men on unequal terms, carry out second and third workshifts, and suffer abuse and sexual blackmail to keep their jobs) allowed them to become aware of other worlds, other ideas, other realities. It enabled them to join together, exchange life stories, recognize themselves as women, and, in their diversity, to organize into groups through which they made important conquests during the Sandinista government: legal and social rights, important laws to their benefit, job opportunities traditionally reserved for men, childcare facilities, and so on.

In these spaces some women used and currently use various techniques and exercises such as poetry, theater, massage, painting, dance, relaxation, and writing personal stories to validate their subjectivity, emotions, intuitions, sexuality, eroticism and bodies, rejecting the

fears that have historically prevented women from expressing themselves. Uniting the subjective with the objective, women laugh, cry, feel, and support one another in these spaces, analyzing and becoming aware of their fragmented identities and defining actions toward change. Some of them have been exposed to similar experiences of female educators in Latin America, and have also had access to the intellectual work of feminists from all over the world, which has enriched their own work.[3] Likewise, they have become aware of the need to recognize their buried history, the importance of conducting academic research that allows a new reading of the past and a greater understanding of the strength that women have maintained through the years of their subordination.

Despite the aforementioned progress, in most all-female spaces won during the revolution -- as well as in public spaces composed of women and men -- it was primarily solutions for the immediate needs of gender that were sought, with a focus on the public sphere. But in addition, when strategic needs were addressed, no exploration was undertaken of the intimate, psychological, affective,

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[3] Examples of Latin American female educators include Rocero, Viezzer, Armas, Pineda, Lagarde, and the groups Manuela Ramos, La Morada, CIPAF, and Flora Tristan. See also Isis International, and the list of CEAAL's "Red de Educación Popular entre Mujeres" (Network of Popular Education Between Women). Influential feminist intellectuals include de Beauvoir, Eisenstein, Ferguson, Kollontai, Lagarde, Molyneux, Sen, Stromquist, and Vargas, among others.

emotional dimension from which jealousy, competition, and rivalry between women arise. This prevented a greater solidarity between them and the coordination between groups needed to achieve unity in diversity -- between classes, different religious and political beliefs, ethnic groups, generations, and so on. Such unity would have allowed them to think into the redefinition of power, the transformation of the "power-over" that defines the relations of domination exercised by men and includes control, coercion and manipulation, into a "power-with" that unites individual abilities, "powers-within," and creatively develops new forms of accountable leadership, consensus and confidence needed for major transformations.[4] Furthermore, because women have tremendous difficulties identifying with each other; experience deep contradictions between the roles expected of them in their home and in their workplace; need power; and admire of what they are not and what they do not have; they attempt to identify with men. When they occupied important positions -- in party structures, popular organizations, unions, companies, cooperatives, etc. -- they

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[4] Power-over refers to domination and control of others. Power-with is social power, derived from one's relationships with and support of other people. Power-within refers to the internal power of personality that a person has, coming from inside her. It is more internal, and usually implies that she is psychologically centered. For a greater understanding of the concepts power-over, power-with and power-within, see Kreisberg, 1992; Fromm, 1947; Rollo May, 1972; Ferguson, 1992; and Starhawk, 1987.

exercised power according to the characteristics of patriarchal "power-over."

Fortunately, women did accomplish crucial advances -- recognizing their diversity, acknowledging the existence of other relations of domination beyond class and gender, noting the complexities of powers that interlace and reinforce one another -- and they thereby opened paths leading toward such a redefinition of power, politics, democracy, and popular education.

New challenges emerge from the Nicaraguan case study. Is it possible to promote such complex and ambitious educational processes in underdeveloped countries with revolutionary governments -- which are themselves attempting to empower the oppressed -- when these countries have historically been exploited, invaded by imperialist countries and confronted militarily in their efforts toward liberation? Was it feasible, for example in Nicaragua -- with the profound economic crisis inherited from Somoza, the economic block and counterrevolutionary war supported by the U.S. government trying to impose its power-over -- to urge the desired changes to "power-with" when that war seemed to require that the Sandinistas centralize their decisions and maintain vertical styles of relations needed to carry out the struggle for national liberation?

The experiences of women in Nicaragua during the period of Sandinista rule undoubtedly contributed important lessons which allowed progress to be made toward resolving the

contradiction between popular education -- as it has traditionally been conceived -- and a feminist education for and from women. Though both processes share the goal of initiating educational action from the experience of the oppressed, facilitating their conversion from object to subject, the former, as has been stated, has been based on a class analysis and as such has been directed at different popular sectors and movements. On the other hand, the education for and from women, based on a gender analysis, managed to incorporate into its transforming intentions the oppression experienced by women as well as class exploitation.

Furthermore, in their efforts toward unity in diversity, women not only recognized the need to tackle with equal emphasis other oppressive relations in society, but also to strive toward a new way of thinking -- a new way of understanding the world which rejects the dichotomies or binary oppositions that characterize masculine thought and seeks integration.[5] Through it, women are breaking new ground toward accepting the view that "difference should not only be tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary

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[5] With the scientific revolution and men like Galileo, Descartes, and Newton, "a mode of cognition that disallows gestalt sensibilities, feelings or subtle perceptions called intuition" (Spretnak, 1991: 119) began to prevail. The world was conceived in terms of dichotomies to be studied scientifically: spirit-matter, man-woman, objective-subjective, reason-emotions, etc. Previously, there had been a more integral way of perceiving the world through which most people understood the interconnections between the different aspects of life (Berman, 1981).

polarities between which our [women's] creativity can spark like a dialectic" (Lorde, ed., 1984: 111-112). The challenge, then, is to avoid relying solely on feminist pedagogy -- just as it is wrong to limit oneself to "popular" pedagogy -- and to explore possibilities for articulating and learning about different pedagogies that have been developed by different oppressed groups. In other words, it is crucial to devise educational alternatives with a holistic perspective that induce a multifaceted analysis of the interlaced oppressive relations that coexist in various spaces of reality such as the diverse groups of women, peasants, villagers, female workers, etc. with which popular education engages.

Under such an approach, the category power relations could be used as a starting point for a group's self-analysis disregarding its particular problematic or "immediate needs." For example, in the case of a group of community women demanding a childcare project, analysis would begin by recognizing the potential and limitations of each individual and thereafter tracing the origins of these from a national, gender, class, ethnic, generational, etc. perspective. The necessary critical consciousness would thus be generated from internal dialogues in the group, defining a common vision based on freedom, justice, democracy and difference, which would also link local and overall realities. This vision would serve as a framework for the negotiations and consenus required to obtain a

complementarity of the participants' unique abilities, knowledge, resources, etc. and would therefore advance solutions to their problems.

The generation of a collective will, a new power-with between the participants would thereby be explored, facilitating the creation of the "oppositional communities" referred to by Ann Ferguson -- striving to resist various forms of oppression -- whether they are single gender, single-ethnic, single-age groups, or mixed (Ferguson, 1992: 13). In this way one would attain a global cultural expression of the yearnings for justice of various oppressed groups derived from each group's specific culture.

Power consists of numerous relations of force present in the different spheres of life. In the conception and exercise of power-over, domination -- exerted through the family, discourse, laws, media, fashion, texts, hospitals, etc. -- generates resistances which occasionally provoke radical ruptures such as the Sandinista revolution,

> But more often, one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducibly regions in them, in their bodies and minds. (Foucault, 1988-1990: 96)

The issue is, then, to deepen the analysis of those transitory points of resistance, imagining for ourselves a future, uniting the past and the present, striving for radical ruptures. To the extent that we will have sought

and creatively explored new forms of power-with, humanity, from different parts of the world, might have greater chances of maintaining and enriching the major transformations that we hope to achieve after those ruptures -- toward equality, solidarity, the preservation of nature, beauty and peace.

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